MAY 30th ISSUE, 1925
VOL. LII No. 6

ADVENTURE

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Adventure

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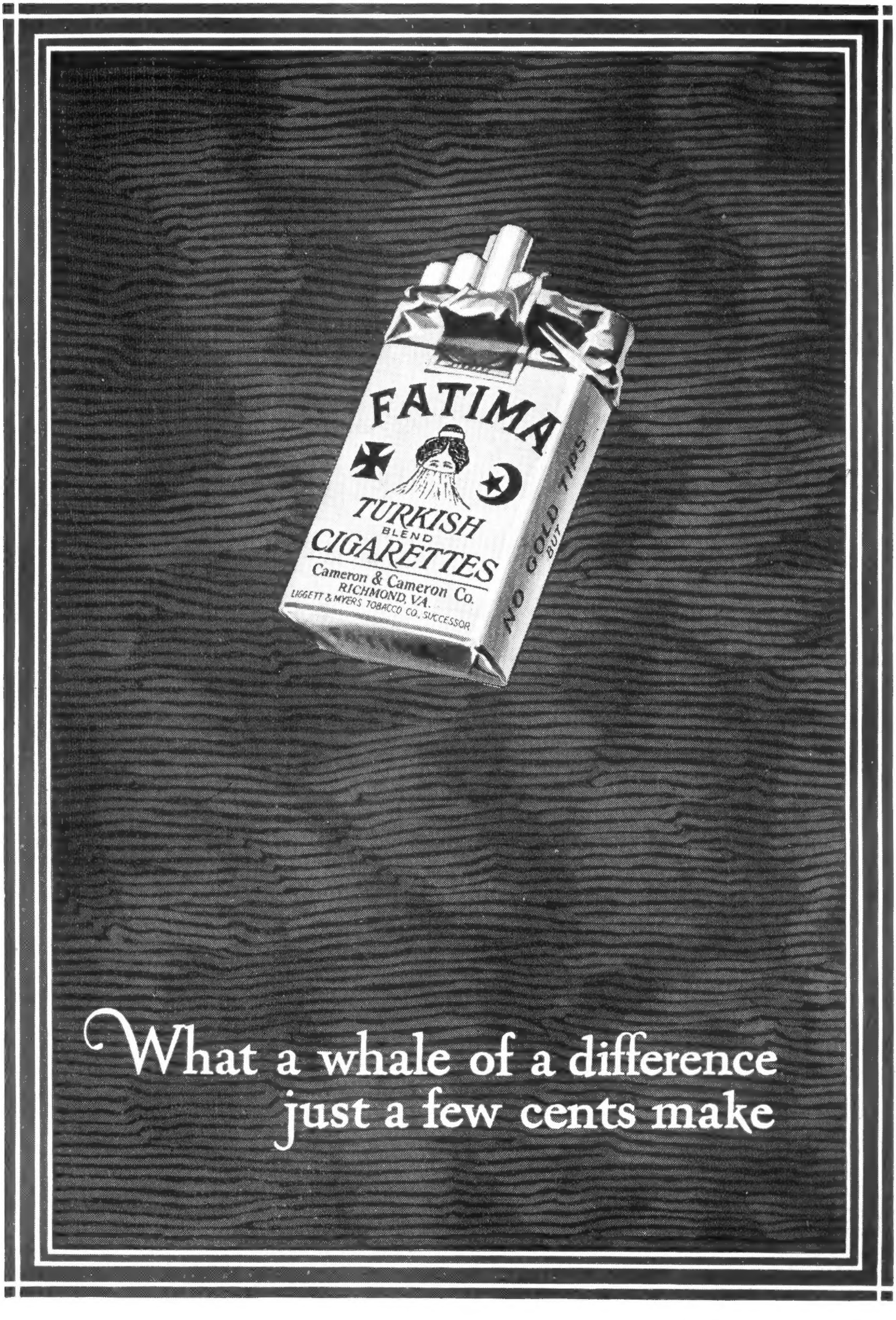
3 Complete Novelettes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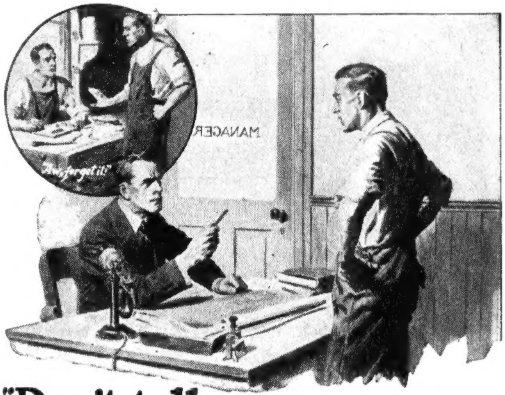

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ADVENTURE
May 30th, 1925

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 52
Number 6

Start May First

LAST year two and a half million babies were born in the United States—our future citizens—the men and women who are to be entrusted with the affairs of tomorrow. Precious as these little lives were, not only to their parents but to the country itself, *one* out of every *thirteen* died before its first birthday.

This tragic waste of human material must be checked. A plan is under way to bring this about. Every mother and father, everyone in America who loves children and his country, is asked to help.

May Day, which has always been one of the banner days of childhood with its picnics and its gayly-ribboned May-poles will hereafter be known as National Child Health Day.

May-Poles—Symbols of Health

When you see the May-poles, think of them as symbols of sound health for children.

All over the country members of religious, business, fraternal, patriotic, labor and other organizations are working to make Child Health Day a success.

There will be celebrations and festivals, public gatherings and speech making. Stores from coast to coast will have special window displays calling attention to Child Health Day. Business concerns, mills and factories will have important health demonstrations.

The men and women who are working for an improvement in child-health are taking steps to safeguard the right of every child to reach maturity in good condition physically, mentally and morally.

Find out what your community is doing to celebrate May Day. Let's not have a slacker town or city in all the country.

Every Home a Health Center

Have your boys and girls physically examined at least once a year. See that they eat the right body-building food. Make certain that they play every day in the fresh air, sleep long hours with open windows and establish healthy body-habits. Give them buoyant, joyous health. Endow them with strong, sturdy bodies.

But remember that the dreams you dream on May First and the plans you make must be carried out every day in the year to give your children the best possible chance in life.

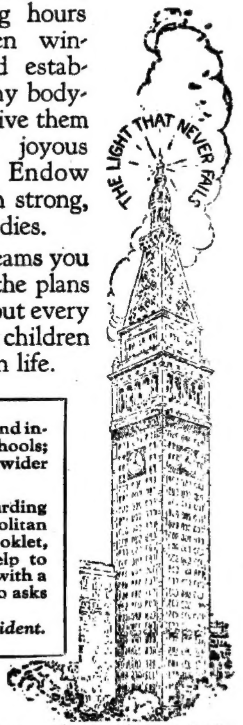
Herbert Hoover's Plea

The purpose of the May Day Celebration is to focus attention upon our most precious national asset—our children * * *

The ideal to which we should drive is that there should be no child in America that has not been born under proper conditions, that does not live in hygienic surroundings, that ever suffers from undernutrition, that does not have prompt and efficient medical attention and inspection, that does not receive primary instruction in the elements of hygiene and good health.

It is for the reiteration of this truth, for the celebration of it until it shall have become a living fact, that we urge all people of good will to join in the celebration of May Day as Child Health Day.

Herbert Hoover.


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

There are upward of 35 million children in the United States who are subject to dangers in many communities by failure of community safeguards. In some sections of the country impure water and impure milk are supplied. In other communities inadequate provisions for health inspection are made. Again, too few playgrounds are opened or too many children are permitted by law to be at work in factories when they should be in school.

Six countries have lower infant mortality rates than the United States. There are many countries which lose fewer mothers in childbirth.

We need more prenatal and maternity care and instruction; closer supervision of health in schools; nutrition classes; more playgrounds and a wider system of public health measures.

The New May Day brings a plea for safeguarding the welfare of our children. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has published a booklet, "The Child", which is a guide and help to mothers. It will be mailed free, together with a Child Health Day program, to anyone who asks for it.

HALEY FISKE, ***President.***

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Biggest in the World, More Assets, More Policyholders, More Insurance in force, More new Insurance each year

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May 30th, 1925 *Vol. LII, No.6*

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy-three geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

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One Complete Novel and Two Complete Novelettes

TALBOT MUNDY

TRIUMPHANT though he had been in sea-fight, *Tros* of Samothrace found Caswallon's followers hostile on his return to Britain. "PRISONERS OF WAR," is a complete novel of the days of Julius Cæsar, by Talbot Mundy, in the next issue.

FARADAY didn't like the business methods of the people of Manaos. He told them so, not once but many times. So they ousted him from their frontier town, and he drifted up the Amazon where, at the risk of his life, he tried to trade with the Indians according to the best principles laid down by his business college. "JUNGLE BUSINESS," a complete novelette, by Gordon MacCreagh, is in the next issue.

LIKE a big wind from the prairie the spirit of civic pride and progress hits Piperock, blowing along with it one complete zoo and causing considerable devastation to "*Magpie*" *Simpkins*, "*Dirty Shirt*" *Jones* and other citizens. What happened "WHEN EAST MET WEST" in a Piperock pageant is told in a complete novelette in the next issue by W. C. Tuttle.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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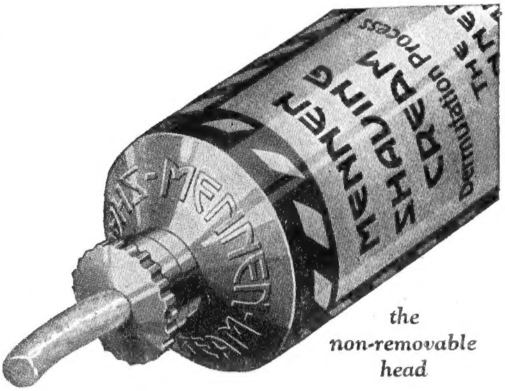

the non-removable head

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Let me hear from you. Contest closes July first. Use the coupon, if it's handier.

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I suggest the name ....

My name ....

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PRESSURE COOKER
FRENCH RECIPES
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The New Butterick Cook Book has chapters on how to buy food, carving, entrées and made-over dishes, meat and meat substitutes, casserole cookery, the fireless cooker, canning, drying fruits and vegetables and scientific information on food values.

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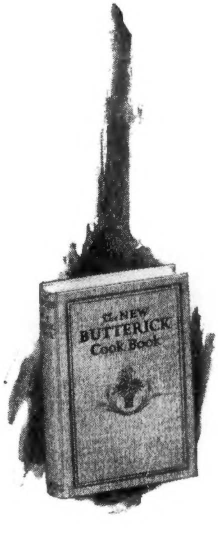

What do these names convey to you?

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Dostoievsky
R. H. Davis
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Irving
Lagerlöf
Gogol
Gautier
Bayard Taylor
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Calderon
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Chekhov
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Mérimée
Heinrich Heine
Fitz-James O'Brien
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The Golden Book

Away with Dull Moments!

There are none in *The Golden Book*, for only the most interesting stories will appear in it—not those which just a few pedants have found interesting, but those that live solely because so many men and women can be thrilled by them, and be thrilled again and again.

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Travel on a Royal Road

Subscriptions are pouring in for the new magazine, with enthusiastic letters of thanks for the wonderful entertainment it affords the whole family. One subscriber puts it very aptly: "I've found the royal road to a command of good English! Why should I read dull books on rhetoric when I can read a magazine full of thrilling stories that at the same time helps me to gain style? Though my writings are chiefly sales letters, I know that style helps here as much as anywhere to win and hold the attention of the reader."

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To substitute real entertainment of the kind found in *The Golden Book* is the one way to offset what has tempted young men and women in every generation. Cocktails, dance halls, freak dress, petting parties are simply defense reactions of the present age. To offer the young people something just as daring, just as exciting, just as amusing—but something that leaves a finely stimulated memory is the job of the editor of *The Golden Book.*

Here in *The Golden Book* are gathered the most exciting, the most readable, the most human tales. Whatever your mood, when you pick up the magazine, there will always be a story to please you.

Order THE GOLDEN BOOK while you are in the mood to be entertained. The subscription price is only $3.00 a year.

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Eat two or three cakes a day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) night and morning.*

Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

Let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z 16, The Fleischmann Co., 701 Washington St., New York.

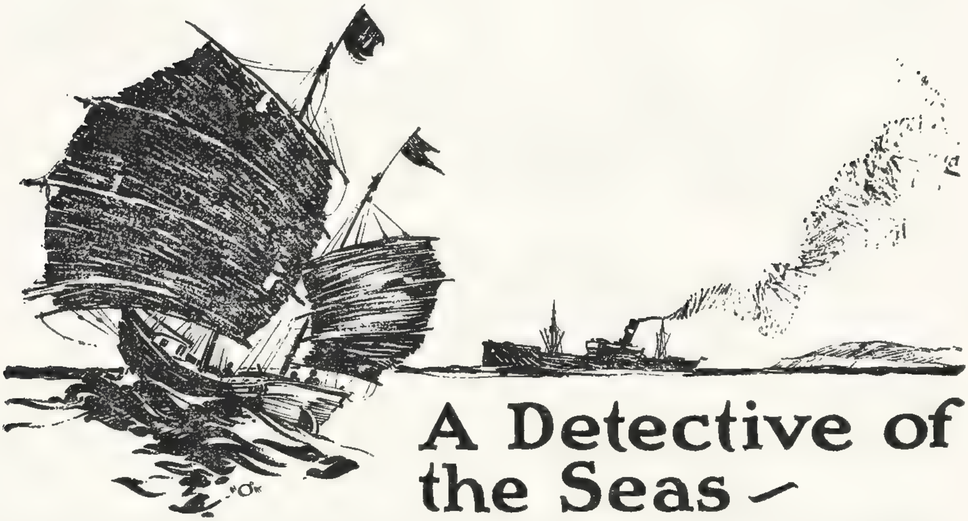
A Famous Food *for health—start eating it today*

"As a child I had developed acne of the face, which became chronic in spite of medical care and good hygiene. Our family doctor advised trying Fleischmann's Yeast. I took it regularly for six months. . . . My face cleared, I lost that thin, pale look, and was able to continue with my work at college."

Miss Rose Cooperman, Brooklyn, N.Y.

May 30, 1925 Volume LII. No. 6

Adventure



A Detective of the Seas

A Complete Novelette by James L. Aton

SAM THOM, fat, placid, cotton-clad, innocent-looking, tea-soaked Chinaman, leaned closer to the curtained doorway as he listened. There was a furtiveness to his pose that told of eavesdropping; he stood half-bent, tensely poised, ready at interruption to leap back to his desk across the room. His habitual mask of innocent placidity was half-lifted and for the moment revealed his soul—the soul of a scheming scoundrel.

At that, if Sam wanted to listen in, there was no apparent reason why he shouldn't be doing so. Among both Chinese and foreigners he was rated as a most respectable and accommodating business man. And here he was in his own shop—his ship-chandler's shop on crooked Broadway in Shanghai, two blocks above the Astor House. Not as large was his shop as some of his crowding competitors' with their bright brass signs and their plate-glass show-windows; yet those who knew whispered that his volume of business and his net profits were well worth while. The long narrow room in which he stood was lined with many dark red shelves whereon stood salable merchandise—the property of Sam Thom.

There were long rows of shining nautical instruments in nickel and brass; there were clumsily substantial mops and brooms; there were buckets of iron and of wood, biscuits in tin boxes, gin in stout square Dutch bottles, seaworthy lanterns of copper and glass. Below the shelves was heaped stuff that at a glance was second-hand—salvaged pilot-wheels and oars and davits and sail-cloth and coils of rope and all the heavy hardware of the seas. On every side were the signs of respectability of Sam's business. Surely a reputable ship-chandler should have the right to hear what was being said on the other side of a bamboo curtain in his own inner office.

From the inner room the voices came clearly to the eaves-dropper.

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"It will pay you," spoke a voice of assertion and initiative—an Englishman's voice, sharp, incisive, impatient, snappish, with the over-riding, bullying accent of the successful Britisher of business. "You cannot afford to turn down ten thousand dollars."

The listening Chinaman at the door gave a gasp of appreciation. Intently he leaned forward to catch the reply. It came slowly, deliberately, thoughtfully, the unmoved reply of one appealed to but unpersuaded.

"That's a bit of money," said the answering voice.

A most interesting voice this was: it was so rich and throaty that one might know it as the voice of a very fat man—as fat perhaps as Sam Thom; there was a suggestion of brokenness to its well-nigh perfect book-English that marked its owner as a foreigner, probably a Scandinavian; it was a voice altogether unhurried, a voice vital with deliberation and thought, imperturbable in its great good-nature, yet withal of absolute positiveness.

"That's a good bit of money," repeated this most interesting voice. "Do you mean to say that for this short voyage you are willing to pay me the sum of ten thousand dollars?"

"I do," came back the sharp and rapid answer—the tone of all-conquering business. "Ten thousand dollars for a three weeks' voyage and an easy voyage at that. Isn't it enough?"

Again there was a prolonged pause—the pause of a man not to be hurried or driven, a man who thought out his own way.

"It is too much," decided the slow Scandinavian voice. "What laws then are you breaking that you can pay so much?"

Sam Thom outside the door impatiently waved his hand in a true Chinese gesture of disapproval.

"I'm breaking no laws, my man," answered the Britisher, no less assertive than before, yet this time a shade slower and more cautiously as one who must fence a bit to win his point. "I am in legitimate business and offering you a fair price. You must understand, of course, that all your expense, coal, wages, food, docking, whatnot, come out of this ten thousand. 'Twill not be all clear profit."

"My expenses will run well below the first thousand," estimated the Scandinavian with maddening slowness. "The *Hshee Chong* is but a tiny steamer with a cheap Chinese crew. Nine thousand dollars and more clear is still too much profit for a three weeks' voyage. Why do you offer it?"

"That's easy to explain," came back the glib voice of the Britisher. "I'm new in these waters you know. Where I come from your cheap Chinese crews are unknown. On my side of the world these days it's costing near ten thousand a month to keep a steamer on the high seas."

Sam Thom relaxed in his listening enough to give his fat thigh a noiseless slap of approval.

"Mr. Davis all same good liar," he whispered to himself. Since birth had Sam spoken pidgin English, and to him it had become as a native tongue.

"You tell me that you've been ten years in the East," suggested the voice of the sailor; his tone was unruffled in its slow good-nature, but his implication was unmistakable.

"Cap'n Christianson him all no fool," reflected Sam Thom with sober face.

"I haven't been in shipping here," retorted the man Davis so sharply that his face must have been a bit red at being caught in a cheap falsehood. "What do I know about your overhead? I can see now, from what you say, that I'm offering you a bit too much. But that will have to stand—I'm not a man to go back on my word. Ten thousand dollars I will pay you for the voyage; it will net you handsomely."

There was a short pause.

"Do you engage that you'll break no laws of God nor man?" asked the captain at last with slow solemnity.

"What do you mean by the laws of God?" parried Davis. "Is that some of your prohibition fanaticism? I intend, sir, to have my whisky each day, and I sometimes play cards. Do such amusements come under your ban?"

"My understanding is that such things are wrong in the sight of God," answered Captain Christianson deliberately and impressively. "If you do them, you shall be judged and punished—but not by me. Therefore I referred not to those things. I referred to the laws that govern the deeds which a merchant-steamer may do."

"I'll get you into no trouble," snapped Davis—his fiery tone saying plainer than words that he resented the captain's inquisitiveness. "If I'm arrested for crime, I'll take my medicine. You'll not be dragged in."

"That, sir, is not enough," said the captain in his thoughtful voice. "The *Hshee Chong* is known as a clean steamer. She can enter and clear from any port on this side of Asia without search or suspicion, for it is known that she breaks no laws. I do not intend to have her good name blackened by anything that you may do on board. If your voyage is to be so shady, you must hunt another bottom."

"Come, come, my man, you're worrying needlessly," said Davis in a voice far more respectful than he had heretofore used, and with a sudden change of front to apparent frankness. "I do not care to tell you all my plans, for I have business secrets that might leak out and bring me loss. In fact, Captain, that's why I so much prefer you to Captain Corrigan of the *Shansi* whom I might employ—he's too talkative to be safe. I'll not tell you my business; it would not be wise; these Chinese walls you know have ears. But the voyage that I plan is within the law. If you catch me committing any crime, you may slap me in irons and bring me back here to Shanghai, and the ten thousand is yours. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"It truly seems so," agreed the captain with unhurried caution. "And what are the terms that you propose on the ten thousand dollars?"

"Two thousand cash in hand," answered Davis without hesitation. "The balance of eight thousand to be deposited to your account in the Hong-Kong-Shanghai Bank, to be subject to your check once the voyage is completed. You'll be made sure of your money. Can you be ready to sail by Monday?"

"Yes, if I decide to go," drawled Captain Christianson. "I will give the matter the most careful consideration and let you have my answer tomorrow."

"Good ——, what is there to consider?" snapped Davis with a sudden flare of impatience. "You know my proposition, and my money is good. Do you want to go, or do you not?"

"I must give it thought," came the unperturbed answer. "I cannot decide so quickly."

"You may have till ten tomorrow," said the Britisher decidedly. "I'm a fool to wait on you even that long. There are a dozen sea-captains in Shanghai who will jump at an offer like mine."

"That is quite true," agreed the captain with courtesy. "And therefore I thank you for waiting. Tomorrow again I shall meet you here at ten. Good-day."

SAM THOM, Chinese ship-chandler, was bent over his desk at the far side of the room, writing busily, when the curtain lifted and Davis and Christianson came out from the inner office. Davis, a typical Britisher, medium height and slender, well-tailored in dark gray, his face as sharp as his voice and with close black mustache, hurried the length of the room and out into the street without so much as a passing nod. Captain Christianson, short and very fat, face unbelievably round and red, and clad in an immaculately clean but much rumpled white uniform, walked over to Sam Thom's side with clumsy deliberation. The ship-chandler looked up with innocent expectancy.

"Thanks for the use of your office," said the captain.

"You all same want to buy ship stores?" asked Sam Thom.

The captain stood for a moment looking down at the speaker; one could not have told from his face whether he stood thus with purpose or whether he was overcome with the lassitude peculiar to fat men in hot weather.

"Your credit still very good," continued Sam Thom ingratiatingly.

"What did you think of my talk with that man Davis?" asked the captain.

"Too much more far," was the glib answer. "Must work very hard. No can hear any words."

"What makes you lie to me, Sam?" asked Christianson.

"No savvy," persisted the Chinaman. "No lie, always tell truth."

"Then tell me why you're pretending to write with a dry brush," commanded Christianson—positively, yet without ill-nature.

The mask of placid innocence dropped for a moment from the face of Sam Thom. He sat speechless, gazing down at the dry brush-pen between his chubby fingers, his evil mouth gaping wide like one who has met sudden defeat. Without further words Captain Christianson swung on his heel and walked out into the street to his waiting ricksha.

At the sound of the closing door, Sam Thom roused as from a hypnotic spell. Disgustedly he flung his brush down on to the red-lacquered desk.

"Me —— fool," he muttered thoughtfully.

II

THE Vice-Consul of the Imperial Government of Denmark to the Port of Shanghai, a young chap of perhaps thirty with straight pompadour of heavy yellow hair, lolled easily in his deep armchair, his feet upon his desk, the while he smoked a meditative cigaret.

The inner office in which he sat was small yet well-furnished, and it bore no marks of being soiled with over much press of business. The few scattered papers between his elevated feet held no matters of urgent import. Indeed it was seldom that this young Vice-Cosul was bothered with matters of urgent import; Danish subjects in China were but few, and no troublesome throngs kicked their heels in his waiting-room as in the more frequented Consulates.

To him entered his Chinese clerk—a keen-eyed, "number one" office coolie in long gray robe, his paunch podding out with oncoming fatness such as became the holder of a leisurely post. He was such a smooth-faced office-man as are numbered by the thousands among the Chinese of Shanghai—speaking three or four languages well, proficient on the typewriter, quick to recall minute details of business over endless years, satisfied to work and to work hard for twelve hours a day, yet happy and, in his own estimate, rich on a salary of forty dollars a month. Because of his prolific tribe American and European office-men do not readily find paying work in the Orient.

"What?" asked the Vice-Consul in Danish.

"Captain Christianson," answered the coolie in the same language.

"In five minutes show him in," ordered the chief.

The coolie nodded and went out as noiselessly as he had come in. The young Vice-Consul spent four and one-half more leisurely minutes with his Turkish cigaret. Then with a sigh he tossed it aside, put his feet to the floor, drew his chair in close to the desk, and stacked up his scattered papers. Thirty seconds later, when Captain Christianson entered, the Vice-Consul was tremendously busy signing documents—so busy in fact that for a full minute he failed to observe the entrance of his visitor.

The captain stood at the end of the desk in the lethargic pose of the over-fat, his round red face as impassive as any Chinaman's, his sharp blue eyes taking in every detail of the room, his immaculate white uniform much wrinkled over his rotund stomach, his five-feet-six of bulky fat seeming to fill the narrow room like a balloon. In general he looked irresistibly like a country doctor endeavoring to pose an an admiral of the seas.

The Vice-Consul looked up with a sudden start as he discovered the presence of his visitor.

"Ah, my dear captain!" he cried springing to his feet. "This is pleasure indeed." Warmly he shook his caller's hand. "Pray be seated," he went on, cordial yet bustling. "I am sorry that you had to wait. I am so busy—you have no idea."

"Before I sit down—"suggested Captain Christianson speaking Danish with slow deliberation yet with the ease that one has only in his mother-tongue, "permit me ——"

With movements quicker than seemed possible to so fat and slow-voiced a man, he stepped forward and pushed the Vice-Consul's big armchair two feet back from the desk.

"That is better," he continued. "Now sit down."

His pudgy red hands with the strength of a Hercules pushed the Vice-Consul down into the deep chair.

"Now your feet on the desk—so," and he pulled them up into position. "Truly you must not go to so much trouble to appear busy when I call. Sit thus, as you were before I came, and light yourself a fresh cigaret. With your permission I'll sit here and smoke my old pipe while we talk together."

The hand with which the Vice-Consul lighted his cigaret shook slightly, and his face under his blond pompadour was very red.

"You are a good politician," went on the fat captain, ignoring the Vice-Consul's discomfiture, the while he stuffed his huge pipe with strong tobacco. His voice was ingratiatingly reassuring in its slow good-nature.

"I am glad to see you so thoughtful in

keeping up an appearance of busy efficiency. Truly it is an excellent act of patriotism. However, I am, as you know, but a plain seaman and would not put you to such trouble. Whenever I call, pray sit always at your ease. Now let us smoke and talk."

"You have sharp eyes," said the Vice-Consul somewhat regaining his self-composure under his visitor's broad flattery. "There is nothing that you do not see and understand; you are like a detective."

"Oh, no, no, no," disputed the captain as he blew a great puff of smoke from his ancient pipe. "I have not sufficient education to be a detective; I am naught but a seaman, and like all seamen I must learn to use my eyes. Our very lives depend upon it.

"We see a strange ripple on the deep sea, and we study it to see what it means. Perhaps it tells of a lurking submarine, perhaps it is the mark of an upgrowing reef that must be set down and charted to make the sea safe for ships. A bit of board drifting on the waves may carry with it the whole story of a shipwreck. With our eyes we must see everything, then with our brains we must work out the meaning. Yet sometimes, when off the sea, I am very much puzzled. I see things, but I cannot tell what they mean. Today, in fact, I am so puzzled, and that is why I have come to you. You are wise in politics and in law; you must help me."

His extended speech ended, he began smoking most vigorously. The fumes from his pipe were strong, acrid, biting. The Vice-Consul coughed, then reached out and rung the bell on the wall at his left.

"Open the window and start the fan," he commanded the answering coolie.

"I can talk better when I smoke," apologized the captain deprecatingly as the coolie left the room.

"Smoke on," said the Vice-Consul courteously. "What is the problem on which you wish to ask my advice?"

"I will tell you," resumed the captain in his slow speech. "You know my ship—the *Hshee Chong*, ten tons under three hundred. How many other steamers of like size ply out of Shanghai?"

"Oh, very many," was the answer. "I cannot tell how many—possibly twenty."

"I know of twenty-three," corrected the captain. "There may perhaps be more than that. Now you know that shipping is in the dumps; I know it even better. For the past three months I haven't taken in enough to pay my crew. There is no freight, and what little there is pays rates far too low. My Chinese partner is getting mightily cross over his investment. Now how many of these twenty-three other coasting-boats, do you suppose, are feeling these hard times as I feel them?"

"That I cannot say," answered the Vice-Consul judicially. "Their governments aid them to some extent, and there is always freight which goes to the more influential companies. Yet, to offset those advantages, you know this coast and its cargoes like a book. You know——"

"Yes," interrupted the captain. "I know when the pears are ripe in Shantung and when the lychee-nuts come to market in Fukien; and I am always there to get them. But pardon me—go on."

"I have heard remarks at the club, "continued the Vice-Consul, "which would indicate that all local shipping, French, British, Chinese, Japanese, is hard pressed for business. But I have no details."

"I have them a plenty," resumed Captain Christianson in his leisurely and deliberate manner.

"Eleven other sea-captains board where I do at the Pension Joffre, and I hear their gossip. Twelve coasting boats have been tied up here in the river for the past month; they have been unable to secure enough cargo to pay them to steam out across the bar. The others, so far as I know, are making intermittent trips; yet they too are running at a loss."

He paused in his discourse and began puffing comfortably at his pipe. The youthful Vice-Consul stifled a somewhat bored yawn.

"It is too bad that business is so poor," he said a little wearily. "You should be glad that you are no worse off than you are."

"I owe every ship-chandler on Broadway," retorted the captain shortly. He put his pipe between his teeth and gave a few sharp puffs as if to express a certain indignation. "However, I have not yet come to the matter on which I wish to ask your advice. I shall do so presently. Is it not true that the British firms in Shanghai usually give their freight to British-owned or British-commanded ships?"

"Invariably, of course," agreed the Vice-Consul. "No Englishman patronizes another nationality if he can avoid it. That is why England has become rich."

"Now for my question," said Captain Christianson solemnly. "Today an Englishman, well-rated in Shanghai, offers to charter my boat for a three weeks' voyage. The price he offers will net me better than nine thousand. I hesitate about closing with him."

"That surely is not such a bad offer," argued the Vice-Consul. "It means three thousand a week."

"A bad offer!" exclaimed the bulky captain. "Man, it's a wonderful offer! It's more than the whole value of my worn-out boat. No such splendid offer has ever been made to a coasting steamer out of Shanghai. That is why I hesitate."

"Are you afraid he will not pay?" queried the Vice-Consul in a bored tone. "Why not——"

"Oh, of course he will pay," interrupted the captain with a shade of impatience. "Don't you understand my point? Why should a reputable British business man pass by a dozen British captains starving for cargo and offer nine thousand dollars' profit to a boat owned jointly by a Chinaman and a Dane whom he knows only by name? It's neither British nor natural. What does it mean?"

The Vice-Consul sat up straighter in his chair. He tossed his burned-out cigaret into the waste-basket.

"The man is crooked," he said with decision. "He intends to use you in some illegal traffic—possibly opium."

"Still you have not answered my question," persisted the rotund captain. He laid his pipe on the edge of the desk and put the tips of his forefingers together in judicial attitude.

"What you say is apparent to anyone. What I ask is: why does he make this offer to *me?* There are capable and well-considered British captains in Shanghai with better steamers than mine who would be willing to lease their vessels for illegal traffic. Some of them would break every law on earth and sell their very souls to boot for ten thousand dollars."

"Oh, I see," and the face of the Vice-Consul shone with new interest. "That is a hard question," he said thoughtfully. "It is not reasonable, as you say. I wonder— Keep your eyes open in true detective fashion, man, and before your voyage is over you will have worked out the solution."

"No," said Captain Christianson slowly in a tone not wholly decided. "I fear I cannot close with his offer. Much as I need the money, I cannot risk becoming a lawbreaker."

THE Vice-Consul brought his feet to the floor with a bang. "Most certainly you shall close with him," he said with sudden authority. "As long as the man admits no unlawful purpose, you cannot turn him down on suspicion alone.

"But if he charters my vessel, I am subject to his orders," reasoned the captain. "And then, if he uses me to break the laws, I too am made a lawbreaker."

"Nonsense!" snapped the Vice-Consul. "When did you read law? The instant this man turns criminal, all your obligation to him is ended. Listen: first insure that he will pay you the ten thousand dollars; see that it is deposited to your order in some reputable banking house. Then, if he loads an illegal cargo, confiscate it as evidence, throw your Britisher into irons and bring him here a prisoner. The money becomes yours—I shall see to that. A proven criminal has no standing under international law."

Captain Christianson sprang of a sudden to his feet, very fat, yet alert and decided.

"I see it now!" he cried. "I can see my way. I shall make the voyage. Thank you for your patience in listening and advising."

He crammed his pipe into his bulging hip-pocket and made a start toward the door.

"I am glad you listened to my reasoning," said the Vice-Consul in the sententious tone of a very young man.

The fat captain swung round, halfway to the door.

"It was not your reasoning that convinced me," he said bluntly yet with good-nature. "I had guidance from a higher source—from the Word of God. While you were speaking, a verse of Scripture came into my mind: 'And David spoiled the Philistines.' Do you see? If David spoiled the Philistines, so also may I. Once let this Britisher show signs that he haileth from Askalon or from Gath, and I shall spoil him without mercy or compunction."

Again he swung about and, very erect and very fat, strode out from the office.

The young Vice-Consul looked after him bewildered.

"Where the —— is Gath?" he muttered to himself as he reached a fresh cigaret. "It surely must be that all sea-captains are crazy," and he shook his head many times.

III

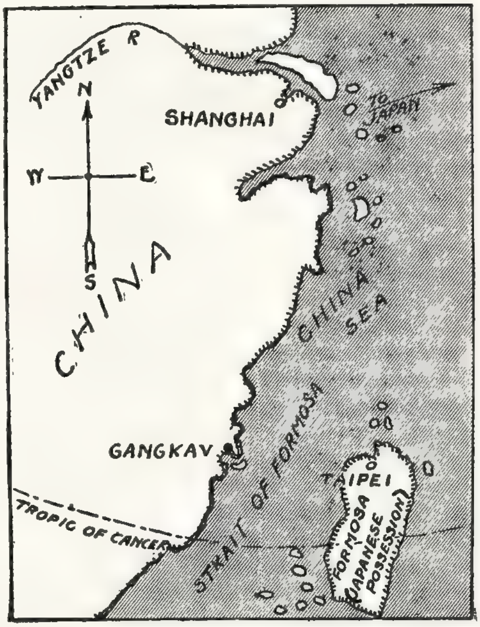
THERE is an ancient, worm-eaten, rotting, Chinese-owned dock well up the river in Shanghai. Slippery it is with fungus and slime, it sags dangerously on rotted-out piles, and it is littered with cargoes gone bad and cast out to stink to heaven. The crooked, unpainted, leaning go-downs that flank its landward side seem ready to tumble down with decay; and the smells from their dark doorways hint of nameless nastiness and disease. Prosperous and reputable coasting steamers pass by such an anchorage as unsafe and unclean; but dirty tramp steamers aplenty still warp in here and hook their cables—because it is cheap.

Here on a hot morning in July—the oppressive humid heat of semi-tropic sea-marshes that crushes down on one like a physical weight—a tiny steamer stood ranged alongside this dock. From her single rusty funnel—slanted back as if bent crooked in a typhoon—a thin wisp of smoke fought to rise, then sank, heat-conquered, down to the water.

On a board swung over her landward side sat a near-naked Chinese sailor who scrubbed intermittently and with epic slowness at the steamer's side—a side that had been once painted black, but was now dirty past all description. Under a bit of canvas shade on the little forward deck a half-dozen bare-trunked, bare-footed, unwashed sailors—all Chinese—sprawled in lazy inertia. Elsewise the *Hshee Chong* lay lifeless and deserted. The sun beat angrily down, and the worker's body shone with sweat.

To the ears of the lone scrubber on the swinging plank there came a sudden sound—the sound of the patter of bare running feet approaching the dock from the landward side. He turned his head and looked up the winding alley—the thoroughfare between dock and city. Presently round the bend came into sight a panting ricksha runner; in his ricksha sat a short man, very red-faced, immensely fat, in rumpled uniform of sparkling white.

The sailor on the swinging scaffolding shouted a vague word of Chinese up over the side of the steamer. Instantly there was stir among the loafers under the canvas on the forward deck. Thirty seconds later when the ricksha rounded the end of the go-downs and came to a stop at the steamer's side, the scrubber was scrubbing assiduously, and the half-dozen sailors on deck were up and at it—shouting ambitious exhortations at one another the while they busily coiled and uncoiled sundry pieces of worn-out rope.



With scarcely a glance about, Captain Christianson stepped from his ricksha and strode up the narrow warped gang-plank in through the steamer's side. Once inside the half-darkness of the lower deck, he paused and listened. Then—

"Bill!" he called out. "O Bill! Bill Pike!"

He waited for a moment but there came no answer.

"Above," he panted to himself and made his way along the dark lower deck to the narrow companionway that led upward. The dark interior of the steamer smelled—nay, more, it stank—ancient, rotting, decayed stinks that hinted of miasma and disease.

From the head of the companionway the Captain turned aft and made his way to the dining-saloon—an oblong, low, narrow room, ill-lighted by a central iron-grated skylight and flanked by four wee cabins, two on either side.

"Bill!" called out the commander. "Bill! Bill Pike!"

Again there was no response. No Bill Pike loafed at the felt-covered dining-table nor sprawled on one of the cabin bunks.

"Where is the fool?" muttered the captain and strode on, through the saloon, up another slippery companionway to the boat deck. Here, aft the saloon hatchway and just under the Captain's bridge, were built up two cabins like white-painted toy houses, in sad need of water and soap. Over the door of one was a brass plate, which read "Captain;" over the other, "First Officer." Both doors were closed and locked, and the curtains were drawn tight across the tiny grated windows.

Captain Christianson pounded loudly on the First Officer's door.

"Bill!" he called out. "Hey! Bill Pike!"

For a moment the curtain at the brass-barred window was drawn aside, and a face appeared—the face of a white man with heavy black eyebrows and a badly frayed Charley Chaplin mustache. The face peeped out—steamy with heat, scary and furtive like a fugitive rabbit peeping round the end of a hedge—then was as quickly withdrawn and disappeared. Followed the scraping of bolts as the door was unfastened from within. It opened, and Bill Pike came forth—a lank, tall, stoop-shouldered, cowardly figure of a man, in dirty white shirt and ragged khaki pants, his gnawed and moving mustache the very epitome of cowardice and indecision—altogether as unlikely-looking a first officer as ever sailed upon the seven seas.

"What were you hiding for?" demanded his captain.

The First Officer looked one way and then another with furtive and evasive eyes, but never squarely at his captain.

"I was scared," he confessed, his frayed mustache moving with his working lips. "Had t' hide."

"You were born scared," retorted the captain. "You're always scared—of everything and anything except the Almighty. What scared you this time?"

"Ching," answered Bill Pike, giving the name a sound like the plucking of a string. "I was scared o' Ching. 'E's on a tear."

The chopped-off words of the First Officer had the flavor of the old-time forecastle. The vintage of his dialect was Cockney, but much muddled by shaking on many waters.

"Ching?" asked the captain questioningly. "What's wrong with Ching?"

"I give 'im orders," answered Bill Pike. "Told 'im t' keep 'is fires low—told 'im as First Officer I was commandin' th' ship. 'E answered me t' go t' —— said 'e'd cut my heart out. 'E'd a done it, too—'e's blood-thirsty—'e's got a knife. So I locked myself in."

He paused, his chewed mustache trembling like a frightened rabbit.

"Bill," said the captain slowly and thoughtfully in a tone that swung between laughter and wrath. "You take a careless word too fearfully. Ching is harmless. Asia fights with Europe in his blood and drives him to desperate talk—that's all."

"I'm wishin' y' had another engineer," muttered Bill Pike.

"There's not another engineer in China could make our worn-out machinery go," retorted the captain. "It's either Ching or the junk-heap for the *Hshee Chong*. Ching is a genius with engines. Now, Bill, I want you to step fast," he went on, his tone changing to one of decision and command. "Get on some shore-togs and comb your hair. I'm taking you off on a matter of business. While you're making ready, I'll step down and tell Ching to take charge."

"Ye won't 'ave no ship left if ye do that," argued Bill Pike. "The *Hshee Chong* ain't safe with no murderer like Ching."

"It will have to be," said the captain shortly. "I need you with me on a matter of importance—cargo. It means money. Hurry, and get ready."

Without further words the captain turned and made his way back down the companion way to the saloon deck. Bill Pike looked after him, doubtfully, his crooked mustache trembling with fear; then, ignoring the command to dress, he tiptoed after his captain. It was to be seen that he feared some imminent catastrophe—perhaps blows and bloodshed and sudden death. He feared—yet he could not resist seeing.

REARWARD along the saloon deck strode the fat captain through the narrow alley between the port rail and the store-room. Bill Pike tip-toed softly a dozen steps behind. The mouth of a yawning hatchway met them midway to the stern. Down it on a tiny iron ladder climbed the captain—down, into the heated darkness of the engine-room.

Bill Pike came to a halt at the top of this gaping pit. Plainly he cared to go no farther. His mouth worked convulsively while he leaned over and listened. Presently from below and further astern there came the faint sound of voices—the slow deliberate baritone of Captain Christianson, and an answering voice of snarly tenor.

The listener was too far away to understand the words; but from the tone it was assured that there was no likelihood of strife. After a minute of listening, the First Officer turned about and hurried back to his soiled toy cabin on the boat deck above the saloon.

IV

PAST the American Post-office and the Astor House and up Broadway trotted Captain Christianson's ricksha coolie. The fat captain leaned back easily in his tiny carriage, his plump hands folded across the much rumpled but immaculately white coat that covered his rounding stomach.

Close behind rode Bill Pike in a common dirty street ricksha. The First Officer had on a badly fitting white duck suit that had doubtless been once laundered but that looked now like the property of a coal-heaver. On his feet were high black buttoned shoes and on his head a much worn brown derby. Self-conscious and fearful he clutched the sides of his ricksha—momentarily anticipating some terrible accident that would shoot him off into eternity unless his coolie slowed down from his break-neck pace of four miles per hour.

At a shout of command from the captain the caravan swung up to the curb and came to a sharp stop in front of the ship-chandler's shop of Sam Thom. The captain and his mate climbed out to the sidewalk—the latter individual pulling on his frayed mustache as one much surprised at being still alive and on the apprehensive lookout for some fresh impending fear.

"Now, Bill," cautioned the captain in low tones. "Remember what I told you. I'm to confer with this man Davis in an inner room. I expect you to see that neither Sam Thom nor any one else listens to our talk."

"Must I fight?" asked the First Officer.

"No, no," answered his chief. "Simply stand by and watch. If there should be trouble, call me. But there won't be—O, my ——, look who's here!"

The last words were blurted out in utter surprise. Bill Pike looked around in startled nervousness to discover the reason for his captain's sudden dismay.

The only other person in sight was a long-robed Chinese gentleman who was strolling leisurely up the street toward the two seamen. Very richly dressed was he in figured silk of gray, very lean of body and thin of face. His long slender fingers were accentuated by his elongated finger-nails, his face was the smooth rich olive of the well-groomed Oriental, his oblique eyes were of uncanny blackness and sharpness.

At first glimpse of hands and robe one might have set him down as a scholar devoted to meditation; but a longer look at the conspicuous hardness of his face revealed him plainly as a dealer in material wealth, one given to exacting hard and cruel bargains.

"Good morning, Li Han," said Captain Christianson. He spoke in the general direction of the approaching Chinaman—his tone unusually nervous and diffident.

"Good morning, Captain Christianson," responded Li Han in excellent English. His face was absolutely unsmiling, his voice like steel. One could hardly imagine an Oriental with a voice so cold. "Where are you going?"

"Looking for cargo," answered the captain.

"You need it," said the other. "Why did you write that last check on me for two hundred taels?"

"Wages," explained the captain. "I had to pay my crew."

"So far you are overdrawn more than two hundred dollars," said the Oriental. "When I entered partnership with you on the *Hshee Chong*, you promised me for her to pay dividend all the time. I do not like to have the losing investment."

"Times have been hard," pleaded the captain. "Business will surely get better soon."

"Even if it should," said Li Han without sympathy, "the steamer is getting in the bad order. The repairs and painting that she must have will take all the profit for many months."

"The tide will turn," persisted the captain. "I am doing the best I can."

"I wonder," said his partner wholly unsmiling. "Are you truly doing the best you can? My advice will be that you shall have a shipwreck and put the *Hshee Chong* in the bottom of the Yellow Sea. Then I can have her insurance money."

For a moment the bulky captain saw red. Into his mind flashed passionate anger at this heartless suggestion, on his lips quivered a dozen suitable and truthful retorts. With deep-drawn breath and close-locked jaws he stood without answering. Then, with an effort, he recovered his good nature. The time for anger was not now.

"Come, come, Li Han," he said humbly yet with poise and assurance. "I have a better plan than that. I have an Englishman who wishes to charter the *Hshee Chong* for a three weeks' voyage and who will pay ten thousand dollars. How is that?"

"That is good," said the partner calculatingly, "if it is really true. That is more than all the value of the ship. Are you sure he will pay?"

"He will pay," answered the captain confidently. "He is a responsible business man of Shanghai. Two thousand dollars in advance is his offer; the remainder to be deposited to our order in the Hong Kong Bank, available on the completion of the voyage."

"There is a lie somewhere to the other eight thousand," said Li Han meditatively. "English business men do not give away their money so freely. Are the papers made up?"

"I am on my way now for that very purpose," answered the captain.

"I will go with you," said the other uninvited as he turned to lead the way into the shop of Sam Thom. "It will be better if I go. I think, Captain, that I know more about making papers than you do, and my interest must be protected."

"As you will," agreed the captain—shortly and without cordiality.

Bill Pike lagged bashfully in the rear as they made their way into the ship-chandler's shop. Sam Thom came bustling forward to meet them, very oily and fat, his cotton coat unbuttoned revealing a great expanse of hairless chest and stomach. He rubbed his hands like a Jewish pawn-broker in vaudeville, suave and self-possessed, placid, innocent-looking, kind of face and voice.

"Morning," he wriggled. "Mr. Davis all same wait other room."

"All right, Sam," said the captain. "Remember—keep your pen wet."

Sam grinned a bit sheepishly.

"No savvy," he lied cheerfully.

Without further words Captain Christianson and his partner made their way into the inner office, leaving Bill Pike alone with the fat ship-chandler.

DAVIS in spruce tropical grey was sitting on a stool in the close and narrow room. His face was moist from the stifling heat, and he was drumming impatiently on the red lacquer table with one of Sam Thom's dirty tea-cups.

"Good morning, Mr. Davis," began the captain. "I have decided to close with your offer. This is Mr. Li Han who will help us in making up the papers for the voyage."

"I do not think his services are required," said Davis as cold as ice. "This is a white man's deal, is it not?"

"I agree with you," said the captain deprecatingly. "I did not invite Mr. Li. Unfortunately I owe him considerable money, and he insists on superintending my business transactions."

"Then you can go to the devil," said Davis shortly. "I do not deal with a Chinaman. There are other ships I can lease."

"Let me explain," said Li Han in his excellent English, becoming of a sudden very suave and agreeable and ingratiating. "I have no things to say about the terms of your contract together. I only wish that I may know of the details, so if any accident should come to Captain Christianson, I will collect what is my due."

"Believe me, Mr. Davis," said the captain in his good-natured voice. "He is here without my wish or invitation."

"Then let him sit back in the corner and be still while we deal," conceded Davis harshly. "I have no use for these yellow Shylocks. I need your ship, Captain, for this voyage, so I will pass over the point and let the man sit by and listen. You have my sympathy if he has any financial hold upon you."

"You wish to start on Monday?" began the captain questioningly.

"If the weather will allow, yes," was the answer.

"What stores shall I have on board?" asked the seaman.

"What you need for three weeks," said Davis. "I have no special orders. I want a case of whisky and plenty of cigarettes, but I will bring them on myself; they must be good."

"Do we head north or south?" asked the captain.

"What matter?" snapped the Englishman. "That's not your concern."

"A difference in food supplies," was the unperturbed answer.

"Call it south then," vouchsafed Davis. "Where does your boat dock?"

"At Tung Chow wharf," answered Christianson.

"That hole!" snapped the Britisher contemptuously.

"You must remember that I am hard up," explained the captain. "I dock there because it is cheap. When we come back from this voyage, I shall be pulling in at the China Merchants."

"Have your boat fumigated," ordered Davis. "I'm not keen for small-pox and cholera. Tung Chow wharf! Phew!"

"I will do as you say," agreed the captain humbly, "and on Sunday I will drop down the river and anchor opposite the Custom Jetty. You can come on board there anytime Monday."

"Have you a tender?" asked the Britisher.

"Naught but rowboats," was the answer. "You will do better to take a public launch."

"You have a rotten outfit," said Davis bluntly, "from all your confessions. I hope the boat will answer the needs of the voyage."

"She is seaworthy," said the captain with a deliberate dignity. "She has good space for cargo, you shall have good food and a good cabin, and I know the coast."

"Oh, I know she will do," agreed Davis carelessly. "You have been well recommended for the work I have on hand. Now I suppose this yellow leech"—with a jerk of his thumb at Li Han who stood impassive in the corner—"is waiting to see that our financial arrangements are satisfactory. Here, as I agreed, is my crossed check for two thousand dollars. You will find it is good. Have you an account at the Hong-Kong-Shanghai Bank?"

"I have no account in any bank," answered the captain with a wry grimace as he folded the check and put it carefully in his wallet, "excepting the Bank of Li Han—and there I am somewhat overdrawn."

"Then we must go to the bank to leave your signature and have you identified," said Davis. "Let us go now and have it over. This room is too hot for business; why don't these worthless Chinese learn to build decent houses?"

"It is close today," said the captain as he rose, "typhoon weather."

"All the less excuse for a room such as this," retorted Davis.

Politely the captain held back the bamboo curtain while Davis passed through into the outer room. Li Han went next, quiet and dignified, his hands crossed over his chest and concealed up his ample sleeves. The captain brought up the rear.

In the outer room Sam Thom was bending solicitously over Bill Pike who was sprawled limp and lifeless upon the floor. So intent was the ship-chandler in fact that he failed to notice the trio's entrance.

"What's here?" asked Davis.

Sam Thom looked up with a start.

"No can tell," he said. "Maybe too much more hot."

Christianson leaned over and sniffed the breath of his loudly-snoring first officer.

"Drugged whiskey," he said meditatively and straightened up. His great red face became white of a sudden with uncontrollable wrath. His irritation at Li Han, his suspicion of Davis, his hard financial straits all these matters that had been unduly stifled in his breast found outlet in a quick flare of anger at the scoundrelly ship-chandler. "Sam!" he bellowed in a voice of thunder—a voice such as seamen use against the shoutings of the typhoon. "Sam Thom!"

"What?" asked the ship-chandler with placid innocence. "No savvy."

"Here," said the captain. "Take this."

With the quickest move any fat man had ever made, the massive Dane shot out his fist and lifted Sam Thom with a mighty swat on the jaw. The Chinaman went into the air, dropped prostrate on his back, then skidded three feet along the tile floor. He lay quiet, looking up at the wrathful captain. On his face was an evil innocent grin.

"No savvy," he said impassive.

V

THERE was a conflict of shifting emotions in the breast of the captain of the *Hshee Chong* as he sat in his smooth-rolling ricksha on his way to the Hong-Kong-Shanghai Bank. Greater even than his flare of wrath at Sam Thom was his steadily mounting resentment at the presence of Li Han who was following them in a third ricksha, quietly disregardful of Davis's slights and insults, intent only upon the security of his pound of flesh.

There was a certain guiltiness in the captain's own conduct that was adding to his irritation at Li Han. During his last three stops in the port of Shanghai he had deliberately steered clear of his Chinese partner, hesitant to confer with him face to face about his losing ventures; whilst at the same time he had written drafts upon him to cover the deficits of his ill-luck.

So now, when the Chinese banker had come upon him uninvited and had taken it upon himself to superintend the contract with Davis, the captain's just resentment was increased simply because of his own unfairness in so long staying away from a personal conference with Li Han.

Mentally he lived again the outstanding scenes of the past two years since the day when he had decided to put the hard-earned savings of a much-buffeted lifetime into a half-ownership on the *Hshee Chong*. He recalled Li Han's early suaveness and affability, his wordy assurances of unlimited financial backing till such time as the steamer should get upon a paying basis, the way in which he had praised and misrepresented the worn-out vessel.

And he remembered the six thousand dollars which he had paid over to the Chinaman for his half interest. Six thousand dollars—lord—it was doubtful if the whole vessel in her best days had ever been worth six thousand dollars.

The first voyages had paid well—lumber from Foochow, bean-cakes from the North. That cargo of electric supplies from Shanghai to Amoy had been a neat little windfall, showing a net profit of two hundred dollars. The next cargo had been harder to find; he had been on the trail of a dozen or more at once, but he lost them all; those Jap coasting steamers had cut under his price; he couldn't haul freight for nothing. That quarantine in Hong Kong Harbor had hit him hard—tied him up a month—and his profits had flown away. Business was worse and worse after that; all the captains were complaining; shipping was overdone. The last straw had been that forged check for two hundred taels which he had taken from that Ningpo contractor. He had been driven to draw a draft on Li Han for coal and wages; a steamer couldn't run without fuel and a crew.

Li Han hadn't been so pleasant to deal with after that. Profits, profits, profits, he was crying always for profits. The captain had some bad hours coaxing enough out of his partner to keep running. He had criticised the captain's really capable management, hinted that there were ways one could make a steamer pay, suggested a cargo of opium. The captain had cursed him roundly at that—silenced Li Han for a week.

The ship-chandlers had been generous with credit—that had helped him along. But after awhile, when they wanted to collect, it wasn't so pleasant. A captain should be a man of poise and power, proud to look the whole world in the face, not having to sneak along back streets like a dog to dodge his creditors, nor having to beg dollars from Li Han.

For indeed he had been forced to beg—beg, until the captaincy and ownership of which he had dreamed during all his early years upon the sea had become to him a nightmare and a curse, and he had more than once wished himself back a common mistreated Danish seaman before the mast.

The offer from Davis had come at the moment when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb. The captain had realized well that no honest traffic could afford to pay such a bribe; and his religious principles, which had the strong flavor of the sea, rebelled at the idea of a bargain with a villain such as this man Davis might be.

He had finally decided to close with the offer only because there was no other way for him to turn; but he had pledged himself to watch the Britisher with sleepless suspicion, ready to put an end to the voyage at the first showing of crime. He had come to Sam Thom's shop on this morning as one might walk into the den of a savage lion. Davis was the lion; the captain was the lion-tamer; and the salvation of his soul depended upon his watching this British beast with unwinking eyes.

The intruding of Li Han had shaken this straightforward program. If Davis was a lion, Li Han was a worse one—more treacherous, more greedy, infinitely more repulsive in personal contact.

Brought thus between the —— and the deep sea, what more natural than to make choice between the two. And so now, as he rode in his shining ricksha between Davis and Li Han, Christianson found himself more and more hating the latter; and more and more looking to the former as a friend because of the antagonism which they seemed to share against the Chinese capitalist.

Temporarily the captain's suspicions of Davis were forgotten; and in a matter of difference between his two companions, he would be sure to side whole-heartedly with the Englishman. If Davis therefore meditated rascality, the captain was most unfortunately thrown off his guard.

It was but a few short minutes ride to their destination. The Hong-Kong-Shanghai Bank was still in its old dingy quarters; for these were the days before the crowding competition of American banks had forced the great British firm to spruce up and build a structure worthy of its wealth. Conservative forever, the Britisher prides himself upon handling a world-wide business with indifferent and insufficient equipment.

A GREAT, poorly-lighted, overcrowded banking room — into such did Davis lead the two partners. Behind the counters a score of sharp-faced young Englishmen handled the wealth of the Orient. They were assisted by three times their number of sleek long-robed Chinese, the resulting effect being that of a concern with many times too much help.

Most foreign firms in Shanghai appear thus overstaffed; the reason for so much Chinese help is twofold: it takes an abnormal number of Chinese clerks to do a normal amount of work; and a plenty of Orientals are considered to act as checks upon one another and so prevent some of the endless dishonesty and thievery.

"Mr. Purvis," said Davis to the young Englishman who answered his call. "This is Captain Christianson of the *Hshee Chong*. I wish to transfer eight thousand dollars to his account to be paid to him when he returns to Shanghai from the voyage upon which he is now embarking."

"I see," said Mr. Purvis pulling his thin yellow mustache with nervous fingers. "I see—to be paid to Captain Christianson. I see. To him personally, may I ask?"

"Quite so," answered Davis decidedly. "To him personally is what I said. How else would you know he had returned from the voyage?"

"I see," repeated Purvis fingering a pen between his two hands. "To Captain Christianson personally."

"Allow me for interruption," said Li Han in his excellent English. "Why you say to Captain Christianson personally? I suggest the amendment that this money be paid either to Captain Christianson or to me—his partner."

"Nonsense!" said Davis roughly. "I said to Captain Christianson personally."

The fat captain made no comment; but his hatred of Li Han increased, and he began to feel a growing fondness for Davis. Why indeed should his hard earnings be made subject to the order of Li Han?

"Pardon me," persisted Li Han suavely. He stood at perfect ease, straight but not athletic, his arms across his stomach, his hands thrust up his wide sleeves. "Pardon me. Such arrangement is not fair to Captain Christianson. He may come back from the voyage ill so he cannot walk to the bank. Maybe he will die. Then the money would not be paid. It will be better then that the sum be made payable to me, his partner."

"Rubbish!" snapped Davis. "How does that protect me? This yellow Shylock would be coming here to draw the money whether the voyage was ever carried through or not."

"I see, I see," said Purvis. "Let me think. I see. What we wish to ensure is twofold; first that the voyage be completed; second that the money be then paid, either to the captain or to his representative. I see. Let me think."

"That is simple," suggested Davis. "Let the money be paid when I come here to order it paid."

"For the good reason," smiled Li Han imperturbably, "that way is not pleasing."

"What do you mean?" demanded Davis.

"Mr. Davis might forget to come to leave the order," suggested the Celestial.

"You are questioning my honesty," flared Davis.

"Then we are even," remarked Li Han quietly.

"Let me think," said Purvis nervously as he fingered his mustache. "I think I see the solution. We wish to ensure the full completion of the voyage. Let me suggest that if either Captain Christianson or his partner calls for the money, we require proof that the steamer has actually returned from her voyage."

"Righto!" agreed Davis. "Let him produce the ship before he gets the money."

"I do not like that way," said Li Han caught unawares. "Maybe the *Hshee Chong* shall be wrecked."

"In that event," said the captain firmly. "I would not expect payment of this eight thousand dollars. That amount is conditional upon my safely concluding the voyage. I agree that the actual return of the *Hshee Chong* to Shanghai is a fair condition."

"Then we are settled on that," said Davis. "Place the money to the order of Captain Christianson upon that express condition."

"Or to me," amended Li Han doggedly.

"Do you agree to that, Captain?" asked Purvis.

"Y-e-s," drawled the bulky captain; but there was doubt and uncertainty in his voice. He stood for a moment in a maze of meditation while Purvis waited questioningly. Pay that eight thousand dollars to Li Han? Never — Not one penny should Li Han have more than was his just due—for the rest the captain had glowing plans.

And yet, in Li Han's debt and clutches as he was, how could he refuse a concession so seemingly fair? After all, he was protected—it was safe to yield. The Chinaman could not draw the money until the *Hshee Chong* returned to port; and when *Hshee Chong* returned, the captain would be on her with first call on the funds.

"Yes," he repeated more decidedly. "You may put Mr. Li's name in the contract. If I fail to call for the money within a reasonable time after the *Hshee Chong* has returned to Shanghai, then let the money be paid to him. I am in Mr. Li's debt," he added apologetically.

"I see," said Purvis, "the money to be paid upon the return of the steamer. What do you say is the boat's name?"

"The *Hshee Chong*," answered the captain. "Danish registry, three hundred tons."

"The *Hshee Chong*," said Purvis thoughtfully. "I do not recall that ship; please wait till I inquire."

Leaving the trio standing at the worn mahogany counter, he made his way to the rear end of the bank. Presently he returned accompanied by two long-robed Chinese clerks.

"These two boys have seen the ship," he said. "They think that they can identify her. For added precaution I will have a look myself. Where can I see her?"

"She will be anchored on Monday," answered the captain, "opposite the Custom Jetty. A black steamer, low in the water, with a slanting funnel."

"I see," said the banker with a vigorous pull at his yellow mustache. "Opposite the Custom Jetty on Monday. I shall see her then. Now let me have your signatures to the necessary papers. You are getting a good price for your ship, Captain Christianson."

"He has a good steamer," said Davis almost cordially.

The captain said nothing, but he beamed upon Davis with a look of growing friendship; common hostility to Li Han had landed him fairly in the Englishman's arms. His suspicions of Davis seemed of a sudden distant, trifling and unimportant. At most the Englishman contemplated nothing worse than some honest peccadillo against the established laws of trade, some profitable bit of smuggling which the captain would be able to foresee and prevent.

With two thousand dollars in his pocket and eight thousand more in prospect, the worries that had been over Christianson like a cloud for so many months lifted and flew away. Only Li Han stood by impassive like a thorn in the flesh; but once let the *Hshee Chong* get back safe to Shanghai from this one voyage, and his squeeze on the captain's life would be broken.

Captain Christianson stood at the counter of the Hong-Kong-Shanghai Bank and visualised himself a growing power in the shipping of the China Seas.

VI

IT MAY have been the clank of dishes in the adjoining dining-saloon that roused the sleeping Davis. He opened his eyes fully from a night of broken slumbers, sat fairly up in his hard narrow bunk, gave voice to a few honest British curses, grasped the brass hand-rail to steady himself, and began to take his bearings.

The *Hshee Chong* was on the open sea and was rolling—rolling most erratically. There was a crooked three-way effect to her roll like a horse trying to run with a short wooden stub in place of his right front foreleg. As she rolled, she creaked—creaked and groaned and pounded. There was something, too, about the chug of her engines that was not right—a sort of knock with each third push of her pistons—that bore down on the *Hshee Chong* with a tremendous thud like a blow from a giant hammer. Surely if a passenger was subject to nervousness or irritation or sea-sickness, the rolling and groaning and hammering of the tiny steamer would keep him continuously uncomfortable.

Like a not unpracticed sailor Davis slid from his bunk and found his feet. Reaching into a wooden case at the end of the cabin, he pulled out a half-full whisky bottle and a glass, poured himself a stiff swig, and downed it at a gulp. Then, barefooted and in striped silk pajamas, he strode to his cabin door and looked out into the ill-lighted dining-saloon.

Captain Christianson was seated comfortably at the felt-covered dining-table downing his morning snack of black toast and black coffee. A tottering, aged, emaciated Chinese "boy" hovered over him, solicitous in his efforts at service. The captain's fat bulk seemed to fill the narrow room like a shining angel; for he was clad as always in a freshly laundered suit of sparkling white that shone amid his dirty surroundings like a spotless lily in its bed of mud.

"Good morning," greeted the captain pleasantly.

"Good morning!" snapped the Britisher.

"Have some coffee?" invited the captain.

Davis grunted assent and took his seat on one of the revolving dining chairs. The captain shouted an order to his servant; the latter tottered off sternward to the galley to fetch the coffee.

"Have a good night?" asked the seaman.

"——, no," snarled the Englishman. "What's off with your boat; is she going to pieces? She grinds and squeaks like the —— himself."

"I hadn't noticed it," said the captain, honestly and with unperturbed good-nature. "Perhaps you are seasick."

"I am never seasick," snapped Davis.

"I am, often," said the captain thoughtfully. "Even now, after thirty long years upon the sea, there still come mornings when I lose my breakfast."

Back into the saloon came toddling the aged waiter bringing Davis his coffee and toast. The Britisher sniffed the toast contemptuously, stirred the thick coffee and swallowed a mouthful of it at a gulp. Hastily he set the cup back on the table.

"Lord!" he said meaningly. "I should remark that you would be seasick."

Perhaps the thud of the engines drowned Davis's words. At any rate the captain's great good nature was unshaken. He had accepted the Englishman with the slow Northern friendship that does not easily take offense.

"It's hard to get up an appetite in the early morning," he said sympathetically. "I am that way often myself. You must excuse me now while I go on the bridge," he continued as he rose. "Bill Pike will be down to keep you company at the table. After awhile I hope to see you on deck."

Out he went, leaving the Englishman leaning uncomfortably against the table; and in no more time than it took to go and come, Bill Pike was down in the dining-saloon.

The First Officer seemed somehow a different man on this rolling ship than he had in Shanghai. His shambling awkwardness and stoop-shoulderedness fitted to the pitching of the steamer like a lady's glove to her fingers. He was barefooted, in ragged khaki pants and soiled white shirt, with a battered felt hat pulled well down upon his head. He rolled into the saloon like a sailor born; but, when he saw Davis, all his nervousness came back over him with a rush.

Awkwardly he pulled his hat from his head and twirled it in helpless fingers till it dropped unheeded to the floor. Then diffidently he climbed into the chair farthest removed from the pajama-clad Britisher and sat there speechless, scary, furtive, chewing his frayed Charley Chaplin mustache, waiting while the senile doddering servant broughthim his morning snack.

"Who does the cooking on this boat?" demanded Davis fiercely while he eyed his broken slice of toast.

Bill Pike nearly jumped from his seat at the sudden words.

"On Ling," he answered with a nervous gulp. "Good cook."

Amazed at his own temerity in speaking thus to the Englishman he leaned forward and stirred his thick coffee—so vigorously that he slopped half of it out upon the felt.

Davis was still thoughtfully picking and eyeing his tell-tale piece of toast.

"It's sour!" he declared presently. "Sour—and full of worms! Lord, such a brutal layout!"

Some feeble spark of contradiction stirred in the chicken heart of Bill Pike.

"This is a good steamer," he ventured to assert—in much the same tone as he might have said, "Excuse me, please."

"Good!" snorted Davis. "Good for what? Good to carry food for fishes! If I had any decent business, you'd not find me on a wreck like this."

* * *

BILL PIKE shrank back, afraid to contradict further. His not to quarrel even lightly with such a cut-throat as this Englishman most likely was. He lifted his coffee-cup in both hands and took in a huge swallow. Then he set it down, leaned forward on the table and furtively eyed Davis. His curiosity—the vast and simple heritage of every seaman—was becoming ravenous beyond repression. Business? What was this stranger's business? Not to know was unendurable. He coughed apologetically.

"What's y'r bus'ness?" he ventured feebly.

"It's not yours," said Davis shortly and ungraciously.

Bill Pike was overcome of a sudden with outraged diffidence. Here was a passenger to be hated—and likewise feared. He slid from his seat at the table, recovered his hat and made slinkingly for the companionway.

"Wait!" ordered Davis. "I want to talk with you."

The First Officer stopped short, swaying easily though awkwardly to the roll of the ship. Should he stay or flee? Curiosity voted him to stay; he obeyed.

"Half a mo' "—said Davis. He dove into his cabin and came out with his whisky bottle and glass.

"Have a drink," he invited cordially.

Bill Pike's mouth watered, and his hand reached out involuntarily. Then with a start he recovered himself; he stood more erect, his face reddened with the memory of shame, he took on a sheepish dignity.

"No," he dared to answer and hated Davis for offering. "I'm on duty."

"Suit yourself," said Davis carelessly. He set the bottle on the dining-table and reseated himself. "Sit down," he commanded.

Bill Pike sidled into the nearest seat, twirling his hat between his nervous fingers.

"That ship-chandler filled you with bad whisky," asserted Davis.

"One drink," corrected Pike.

"Did the captain go back and have it out with him?" asked the Britisher.

" 'E wasn't there," was the answer. " 'E'd gone away."

"How large is your crew?" demanded Davis with a sudden change of subject.

"They's seven seamen," answered the Mate, "an' they's the cook an' th' boy, th' Engineer an' 'is helper, th' two stokers an' th' Capt'n an' me. They's fifteen men all told. Th' seamen is all Chinks."

"Is the Engineer Chinese?" asked Davis.

"Half," answered the First Officer with brevity.

"Have you any fit food on board?" asked the Britisher.

"Fresh lot o' stores," was the answer; and what did this bloomin' Davis mean by pumping Bill Pike; and by trying to bribe him with drink? No way this to win the regard of the First Officer; 'twas conducive rather to cordial hatred.

"Where is the kitchen?" came the next question.

"Th' w'at?"

"You call it the galley—where you cook?"

"Ye mean th' caboose," corrected Bill. "Aft on this deck."

"I'll have a look after I dress," said Davis rising and with the action dismissing the First Officer. "I'll see that I have a fit breakfast; this mess is beastly."

The captain was on his bridge, directing the man who stood beside him at the wheel. It was a morning of glowing brightness; the heat of the sun was beginning already to burn up the freshness of the breeze. The sea had the choppy roughness of the China coast. Off to starboard was a low coast of shimmering green; to the left was the open sea. The ship was heading almost due south, traveling at some six knots with a dogged pounding that marked her as an ill-balanced sailor.

Up the narrow companion to the bridge rolled Bill Pike with all the grace of a master seaman. Easily he hitched up his ragged pants with his left hand, whilst with his right he pulled from his pocket a plug of tobacco and bit off a giant chew. Plainly he was at ease with his captain as with no other man on board—probably in all the world.

"W'at's that Davis's bus'ness?" he shouted at his superior.

"Off a point," sung out the fat captain. "So. Hold her there. I don't know," he answered.

" 'E's a villain," asserted the First Officer.

"I don't know that he is," said the captain. "At least he is a gentleman."

" 'E's a villain," repeated Bill Pike with conviction. " 'E was a quizzin' me about th' crew. 'E means t' wreck th' ship."

"Bill," said the captain comically. "Have you found something new to scare you?"

"I'm a goin' to watch 'im," said Bill. "I'll keep m' eye on 'im. I don't like th' bloomin' beast."

"Do that," agreed the captain not without curiosity. "Watch him like a detective. Bring me a daily report of his latitude and longitude, and don't neglect to summon me at the first symptoms of piracy."

"I will be a deteckative," burst out the First Officer with a sudden astonishing declaration of purpose. "I'll save th' ship."

VII

"I'LL be a deteckative," mused Bill Pike as he leaned against the rail and spat tobacco into the sea. "Blooey! but that's a good idee."

Many a lazy hour had the First Officer lain on his bunk in idle ports reading paper-backed fiction of lurid content. Violence and murder and sudden death were not half bad when bloodily depicted on paper; it was the imminent danger of running into them in real life that made him slink through the world in a perpetual funk. Of all Bill's heroes of the printed page a certain New York detective was his favorite.

Here was a man indeed—arresting criminals red-handed, coping alone with all the powers of vice, winning out always against desperate odds. Yet with no dream of doing likewise did Pike now dub himself detective; less exalted his objective; to be honest, he was itching with curiosity.

" 'E ain't got no right," he reflected with self-righteousness, "a keepin' his bus'ness a secret from me an' th' capt'n. 'It's none o' y'er bus'ness,' says 'e. Th' bloomin' villain—'e'll find I'll make it mine. I'll deteckative him till I learn his —— secrets."

With these and other muttered threats the mate deceived his conscience; till he drugged himself into believing that his lazy snooping into Davis's privacies was the noble crusade of a detective against crime. Then cautiously he tiptoed down the companion into the dining-saloon.

" 'E's a dressin'," reflected the self-made detective as he saw the closed door of Davis's cabin. "I'll watch till 'e comes out;" and, ashamed to be caught, he closeted himself in the cabin opposite and watched through the key-hole.

Thirty minutes later, his neck stiff from peeping, he saw the Britisher lock his cabin door behind him and pass out through the dining-saloon, walking with the practised roll of one who has sailed on many pitching ships. Forth from his hiding-place came Bill and took up the dangerous trail toward the stern. Fortunate now, his scary, slinking, fugitive ways; the half-naked Chinese sailors whom he passed saw nothing beyond ordinary in his stooping, nervous, watchful, timid gait.

At the door of the dining-saloon he stopped to reconnoiter; again at the port rail he halted to look hither and yon; on past the corner of the bath-room he paused once again. And well for him!

Just beyond the bathroom was a bit of open deck—the breathing-ground of the engineer when off duty. The engineer who loafed here often in a reclining wicker chair was the Eurasian, Ching, the especial terror of Bill Pike. Davis was seated on the foot of the long chair and chatting amiably with Ching.

" 'E knows 'im!" thought Bill in horror and strained his ears against the vagrant breeze.

To one not looking upon the engineer as a bloody scoundrel he offered a face not wholly unpleasing. A changing face it was;

seen at one moment it had the passive vacuity of a Chinaman; then again it shone with the dancing madness of an Irishman. The eyes were as black as the eyes of Confucius; but the hair above them was the opaque red of a nasturtium.

His expression was marred by an unlifting cloud; whether China or Ireland was uppermost, there was always a brooding sullenness as of one much mistreated by fate and much given to meditation thereon. A man with a face so perpetually sullen might not be a scoundrel; but he was in a fair way to become one. For the rest the engineer was a big man but underexercised—dirty, greasy, black, unwashed and savage.

A word came occasionally to the ear of the listening detective; the most of what was said was drowned under the hammering of the engines.

"—no good—" so spoke Davis.

"—navigation—" from Ching.

"—three trips—" Davis.

"—look out for typhoons—" Ching.

"—keep him—" Davis.

Ching's response was hammered out of hearing.

"—pay each trip—" Davis.

THREE hours later the captain was nearing the end of his spell on the bridge. In another ten minutes he would be relieved by his First Officer. The captain was good-naturedly smoking his biting pipe; the steamer was well into the open sea; a generally southward course would answer all the needs of the voyage; it was easy going.

The heat had become intense; and with the heat there were coming up to the bridge the myriad odors of the *Hshee Chong*. The captain of course from long usage did not notice them, but the smells were there—smells of rottenness, of decay, of heaps of filth, of the unwashed hold where spoiled fruit was breeding into disease.

Up to the bridge rolled First Officer Bill Pike.

"A good morning," quoth the captain. "The glass is high."

"I've been a watchin' that —— Englishman," announced Bill.

"What did you find?" asked the captain with amiable interest.

" 'E's a plottin' mischief," said the First Officer. " 'Im an' Ching are in together. They're a goin' t' put us in irons an' take possession of the ship."

The fat captain gave the lank detective a great slap on the shoulder.

"Bill," said he with high good-nature. "You were born afraid. If some one should give you a little white pet dog, you'd be a making out that he was a raging lion. Now stop imagining and tell me the facts. Just what did you see Davis do this morning?"

" 'E locked 'is cabin," began Bill. "Ain't that suspicious?"

"Maybe so and maybe not," said the Captain. "I'd say 'twas the wise thing to do. What else?"

" 'E went up an' talked with Ching," went on the First Officer. "They talked f'r twenty minutes."

"What did he say?" demanded the captain.

"I couldn't hear," answered the Mate. "Th' engyne was a poundin'. Only got a word now 'n then. 'No good,'—'Three trips,'—'Keep 'im,' an' things like that. I knowed they was a plottin' from their faces. They mean to seize th' ship."

"That sounds proper bad," agreed the captain with an attempt at mock seriousness. " 'No good?' eh? Maybe he meant the coffee. Come to think, it was a bit thick this morning. What else did you see?"

"Ye'll believe me some day," prophesied Bill with fearful conviction. "I tell ye I don't like that Davis—'e's too smart. After 'e'd fixed it all up with Ching, 'e went back an' threw On Ling out of th' caboose—the galley 'e calls it."

"Threw out On Ling?" said the captain incredulous. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean w'at I said," affirmed Bill Pike, triumphant in having at last gained the sober attention of his superior. "'E threw On Ling out o' th' caboose."

"What made him do that?" asked the round-faced captain, puzzled and pondering. "Threw On Ling out of the caboose. What did he mean?"

"That's w'at I asked 'im," said Bill. "I felt that as First Officer I'd better interfere f'r th' good of th' ship."

"You mean you were curious," corrected the captain, "the same as I am. How did he answer you?"

"'E told me t' hold my tongue an' get out," began Bill.

"He would that," put in the captain.

"'E said On Ling couldn't cook fit f'r a dog," continued the detective. "'E said 'e was hungry an' was a goin' t' do some cookin' on 'is own."

"I don't much blame him," said the captain charitably. "It must be hard for a stranger to put up with On Ling's cooking."

"On Ling's a good cook," asserted Bill stubbornly. "Ain't 'e cooked man an' boy f'r fifty years?"

"He has that," agreed the captain. "He's cooked till he's gone stale. Let Davis cook his own if he wants to. There's plenty of stores. How did On Ling take it?"

"'E's a dancin' around like a madman," said Bill solemnly, "a clawin' an' swearin' an' screamin'. I wouldn't wonder 'e'd mutiny."

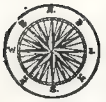
The idea of the aged, frail, half-blind, tottering Chinaman in the act of mutiny tickled the captain like a feather. He gave way to a great roar of laughter.

"Yes, ye c'n laugh," said Bill Pike disgusted. "But you'll see w'at I say'll come true. I know why 'e threw out On Ling."

"And why is that?" asked the captain.

"'E's a goin' t' destroy us," said the pessimistic First Officer. "When th' right times come, 'e'll use th' cookin' fires t' burn up th' ship. Ye wait an' see."

VIII



BILL PIKE, First Officer of the *Hshee Chong*, leaned idly against the starboard rail on the boat deck and spat overboard an occasional surplus of tobacco juice.

It was mid-afternoon and the third day out. Above was sunshine; the west wind was savage and hot; and the sea was restless with a short quick swell that shook the tiny steamer like a tree in a gale. Listing heavily and rolling hard, she was doggedly pounding along at five knots on her southward course.

Unmindful of the wind and the roll, the First Officer spat often and chewed fast. He was dealing with a daring idea that had popped into his mind.

For two long days he had played the detective. It was most uncommon for him to hold to one purpose as persistently as he had thus been doing. There were compelling reasons—his hatred for Ching, his distaste for Davis, the apparent friendship between the two. Above all the unsoothed itch of his curiosity. And then there was the attitude of his captain; to Christianson, Bill Pike in the rôle of detective was a delicious joke.

The fat captain refused to look on Bill and Bill's suspicions save as matter for levity and jest. Well Bill knew that a joke against a seaman could endure for years and spread over all the seven seas; for his own future peace he dared not turn from his detective career until he should have secured evidence that would win the sober respect and approval of his captain.

After his two days of intermittent shadowing, the mate had no more evidence to uphold his vague suspicions than had been his at the beginning. So far as he could discover, Davis steered an even course, emptied a bottle of whisky a day without ever a stagger, smoked countless cigarets, and spent most of his time loafing in his tiny cabin off the dining-salon. Occasionally he stopped to converse with Ching,—but only casually—and the mate could never overhear what was said. Three times had he gone to the caboose, there to curse the aged On Ling for vile cooking and to issue commands. The cook said, "All light," but he misunderstood or ignored.

"I ain't got no chance," said Bill Pike to himself. "That —— pirate does 'is mischief while I'm chained t' th' bridge."

Then came his daring idea: to secure a confederate who would shadow Davis and watch for evidence during the hours while he, Bill Pike, was on duty as First Officer. And he knew who would do it—Jim.

Jim was the English-speaking member of the Chinese crew. On a larger ship he might have been called boatswain; here he was only Jim. He drew a dollar a month more than any of the other seamen. He had pronounced standing among the crew inasmuch as every one of them had been hired on his recommendation. His duty it was to translate to the men such commands as they could not comprehend, since the total English vocabulary of all the rest of the crew did not include thirty words.

"Jim 'ould do it," reflected Bill Pike while he leaned stoop-shouldered against the rail and shifted his chew from right cheek to left. "An' the hull crew 'ould help 'im. They all 'ang together. I wouldn't wonder 'e'd do th' hull job f'r five dollars."

The First Officer chewed on for a moment contentedly and spat with unction. The mental picture of seven ragged Chinese seamen unitedly dogging the steps of Davis was pleasing to contemplate.

"Cap'n 'ould object," meditated Pike. "I'll not tell 'im—not till I get the evidence. I'll make Jim keep it a secret."

Again he chewed and spat and revelled in his wild idea. Then of a sudden he slapped down his hand with a gesture of inspiration upon the rail.

"Jim 'ates Ching," he said with exultation and discharged over the rail a tremendous gob of tobacco. "They all of 'em hate Ching, an' Ching 'ates them. I wouldn't wonder they all 'ate Davis too—th' way 'e swears at On Ling."

Bill Pike became on the instant aware of the rush of feet toward him across the deck. He swung round to see who was thus breaking into his meditations. As he turned, a fist caught him sidewise on the jaw—caught him, lifted him, threw him sprawling upon the deck.

"Spit on me, will you, you dog!" snapped out the wrathful voice of Davis.

Without attempting to rise, Pike turned his head and looked up at his assailant. The Englishman stood above him swaying like a born seaman to the roll of the ship, his fists clenched, his face hot with anger. Brown tobacco juice was trickling from his eye and down his cheek.

"I didn't spit on ye," disputed the prostrate man feebly.

"You did," snarled Davis and fetched the mate a kick with his foot. "The wind blew it on me below. You vile dog!"

The worm, Bill Pike, half dared to turn.

"Well, kill me," he said with hatred in his voice. "Kill me, an' be hung to ye, ye —— pirate."

"Keep your place or I will," threatened Davis. He drew his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his dirtied cheek and eye; then without further words turned and made his way down the rear companion to the saloon.

Bill scrambled to his feet, rubbed the side of his smitten jaw, concluded he was not seriously hurt, then made his way up to the bridge. The fat captain, clad as always in spotless white, and whistling most cheerily, was pacing idly back and forth behind the man at the wheel.

"What ho?" said the contented commander. "How is the great detective?"

"That villain Davis," complained the mate. "'E 'it me; 'e knocked me down."

"Why didn't you hit him back?" asked the captain without sympathy. "You're bigger than he is. A detective has to expect to fight, hasn't he? What made him hit you?"

"I spit in 'is eye," owned the First Officer.

"You spit in his eye?" repeated the captain incredulous.

"I did," affirmed Pike with a faint touch of achievement. "I spit in 'is eye."

"Bill," said the captain solemnly. "Are you drunk—or are you crazy—or both? You go below to your cabin till you sober up."

"I tell ye—" began Bill.

"Get off the bridge!" ordered the captain. "Can't you see I'm in charge of the ship? I have no time to listen to fairy-tales."

Uncertain whether his captain was in earnest or in jest, the First Officer turned about sulkily and started down the companion.

"Bill!" called the captain after him.

The departing seaman stopped short and lent an ear.

"Ay, ay, sir," said he.

"You spit in his eye and he knocked you down?" asked the captain in the manner of a cross-examiner.

"'T's —— truth," said the mate. "I did."

"Then all I have to say," commented the captain calling over the rail, "is that you had the best of it. You ought to be satisfied. Now go to your cabin and rest. Off with you!"

The captain turned back to his cheery whistling, and Bill Pike went on down the companion to the boat deck but went not to his cabin. Rubbing his jaw ruefully, he stood for a single moment in thought. Then—

"I'll do it!" he decided with sudden fervor; and went over the forward rail and down the ladder to the lower deck, thence forward to the forecastle.

Neither captain nor First Officer often entered the forecastle—never in fact unless a seaman was reported injured or sick. Inspection there was none. The *Hshee Chong* for purpose of economy had been for months undermanned; and the captain realized well that it would be impolitic—nay, more, impossible—to insist strictly on discipline and cleanliness. The crew, in their own estimation overworked, would have rebelled to a man and have gone on strike.

AS BILL PIKE bent his tall head to enter the low doorway at the head of the covered forecastle companionway, he heard from the dark quarters below the quick chatter of startled Chinese voices. Before he had gone two steps down, a pair of half-naked off-duty seamen rushed up the steps and barred his further descent.

"Stan' aside 'ere!" ordered the mate with a great show of bluster. "What d'ye mean, stoppin' y'er s'per'er officer?" He sought to push past the two sailors, but they held their ground, peaceful and positive.

"All light," they chorused cheerfully. "All light."

"Stan' aside 'ere!" repeated Pike. He was helpless, and he knew it. The men could not understand his English, and they outnumbered him physically. He dared not call in the captain; for the latter would make mock of his purpose. "Stan' aside," he said again weakly. "W'ere's Jim?"

"Jim?" answered one of the seamen. "Jim topside, all light."

He ducked past Pike out of the forecastle companionway and was off to summon Jim. From below, another off-duty seaman sprang up the steps and filled his place, so that there were still two men warily guarding their castle against the entrance of the mate.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said the puzzled officer.

"All light," cheerfully answered the seamen. "All light."

Bill gave up trying to peep into the darkness of the forecastle and stepped back on deck. He was in time to confront Jim who came up on a dogtrot—a short stocky Chinaman with a queue coiled round his head, bare-trunked and blue-overalled.

"All right," grinned Jim. "Me savvy, all right."

"Why can't I go in th' fo'csle?" demanded Pike.

"No can tell," answered Jim with innocence. "Maybe all same men sleep, maybe sick."

"I guess not," said the officer. "They're awake an' a chatterin'. W'at mischief are they in?"

"No can tell," said Jim with a suggestion of impudence. "All good men. You want look f'castle, you go ask capt'n."

"Oh, never mind," evaded Pike. The errand on which he had sought Jim popped back in his mind. It would be foolish to antagonize this sailor whom he wanted as a helper by insistence on an impossible forecastle discipline. "Jim," he went on pleasantly. "Ye know Davis?"

"Davis," said Jim. "All right, I know. Very good."

"'E's a villain," continued Bill, "a bad man."

"Yes," agreed the Chinaman complacently. "Him bad man, very bad."

"'E kicked On Ling," went on Bill. "Maybe next 'e'll kick you. 'E's a bad man."

"Sure," grinned Jim amiably. "Him kick On Ling. Maybe him kick me. Him very heap —— bad."

"I want ye t' watch 'im," explained Bill. "Watch w'at 'e does. 'E wants t' steal th' ship."

"Sure," put in Jim. "Him steal ship, must watch very good."

"W'en I'm on th' bridge, I can't watch," went on Bill. "So then, you watch—'ave all th' men watch. Tell me everything 'e does. Ye all watch very good, tell me everything ye see, I'll give ye five dolars."

"All right," agreed Jim, wholly complacent and most oddly uncurious. "Me watch very good, all men watch very good. Tell you all same everything. You give me five dollars. All right."

"I want ye—" began Bill, then broke off. Somehow he wanted to impress on this grinning celestial the importance and seriousness of this mission; but he knew not how to do it. He had the feeling that what he had said hadn't penetrated. He swung away abruptly, crossed the narrow deck and swarmed up the ladder to the boat deck in a peculiarly dissatisfied frame of mind.

"That fo'csle," he pondered pausing with his hand on his cabin door. "They's somethin' wrong. I wonder—I'll tell th' capt'n."

Reluctantly he made his way upward to the bridge. The captain was leaning idly against the starboard rail gazing off at the coast—distant and mountainous.

"Say," demanded the First Officer. "W'at's brewin' in th' fo'c's'tle?"

The captain shifted his position a bit before he answered.

"Are you a doing your detective work on the crew as well?" he asked cheerfully.

"No, I ain't," said Bill decidedly. "I'm a tellin' ye as an officer to 'is capt'n—they's mischief in the fo'csle."

"Go on," ordered Christianson without comment.

"I was down there a bit ago," began Bill.

"What took you there?" demanded the captain.

"T' see Jim," answered the officer. "I wanted t' ask 'im—" he hesitated for the fraction of a second—"ask 'im if 'e'd seen my shoes," he concluded.

"Bill Pike," said the captain without equivocation, "you're lying. Now tell me one truth: Are you so mad at Davis for striking you, that you're trying to hire a chink to knock him in the head?"

"I ain't no murderer," said Bill hotly.

"Well, then, that's all right," said the captain keenly. "I can see you're speaking truth. Now what about the forecastle?"

"They wouldn't le' me come in," said Bill, "an' they acted strange."

"Is that all?" asked the captain.

"I c'uld feel it," added the Mate. "Somethin' wrong—mischief."

"Gambling most likely," reflected the captain. "There's no law on earth can keep them from it."

"It wasn't no gamblin'," persisted Bill. "I know gamblin'. This was somethin' more strange."

For answer the bulky captain leaned far over the rail.

"Jim!" he bellowed at the deck below. "Jim!"

A sailor down on the forward deck heard the call and sped away to fetch the summoned seaman. In no time at all Jim, grinning amiably, was up on the bridge.

"You call?" he asked pleasantly.

"Jim," said the captain in the tone of a master of men, "what's brewing in the forecastle?"

"Fo'csle?" repeated Jim with a bland and innocent smile. "Him all same very good. Him eat, him sleep, him sing, him pray, all very good."

"I want no gambling," said the captain sternly, "and no mischief. You understand?"

"Sure," assented Jim. "Me understand. Fo'csle very good, all men very good. You want look see?"

"No," said the captain. "I'm not prying around. I'm holding you accountable. Understand?"

"Sure thing," answered Jim. "Me understand. Fo'csle all very good. I know."

"Now are you satisfied?" asked the captain of his mate as Jim took his way off the bridge.

"No, I ain't," said Bill Pike stubbornly. "I tell ye they's somethin' wrong."

"Well, Bill, you're a detective," said the captain pleasantly. "Go on ahead and do some detective work in the forecastle. Only be careful. Davis knocked you down, but some of these sailors will be apt to split you with a knife."

The First Officer shook his fist futilely in the air.

"I'll show ye yet," he cried in impotent wrath at the grinning captain. "I tell ye this v'y'ge is wrong—Davis, Ching, th' crew, the fo'csle, everything!—an' ye're blind to it all. But you wait. I'll show ye yet!"

IX

FROM his post on the bridge the next forenoon First Officer Bill Pike saw that which made him deeply think.

He saw Captain Christianson in a fresh uniform of shining white, having but then emerged from his cabin, climb over the rail and down the ladder to the forward deck. Picking his way daintily among the rubbish of ropes and buckets, of lanterns and stores that littered the deck and evidenced a poorly kept ship, he made his way to the entrance of the forecastle.

" 'E laughed at me," said Pike to himself a bit resentfully. " 'E wouldn't own up 'e believed me. All th' same 'e's cur'us to look into th' fo'csle f'r 'imself."

Still neglecting navigation to look, the mate saw a lone sailor, who had been squatting on the forward deck eating his rice, throw down chopsticks and bowl at sight of the approaching captain, jump to his feet and rush at full speed back towards the stern.

In another moment came Jim running somewhere from the rear towards the forecastle. He reached Christianson at the very moment that the captain was entering the forecastle companion. Seizing his commander by the arm, the sailor began to jabber excitedly, at the same time pointing aft past the saloon. It was of course too far and the breeze too fugitive for Bill Pike on the bridge to hear one word of Jim's excited summons.

“ 'E's a-tryin' t' get th' capt'n away from th' f'castle,” deduced the detective.

Yielding on the instant to Jim's excited insistence, the fat captain turned his back on the forecastle, ran like a boy up the ladder to the salon deck, thence went sternward on the run towards the caboose—Jim close at his heels singing for greater speed.

It was inevitable that curiosity regarding these mystic movements should be uppermost in the mind of the First Officer. He stood gazing sternward for a full minute, eager to see what might come to pass. His watching was unrewarded; the captain and Jim had rushed pell-mell into the caboose, and in the caboose they remained. Pike could only speculate.

“Like enough 't's that villain Davis,” he reflected, and, after the manner of a navigator on duty, he turned and took an all-embracing look round the horizon. As his gaze swept forward, he glimpsed from the tail of his eye that which made him start in excitement—a white-clad figure that had popped out from the forecastle ducking in out of sight under the shelter of the main deck.

“——!” gasped the First Officer and stared with gaping and convulsive mouth. The figure, whoever or whatever it was, had gone and did not reappear.

“ 'Twasn't no seaman,” reflected Pike. “They ain't no sailor on board got no suit o' white.”

Further than that he could not even guess; so quickly and surprisingly had this mystery flashed across his vision that his eyes had failed to register more. Unable to leave his post on the bridge, yet consumed with curiosity, he paced tensely back and forth and prayed for the reappearance of Christianson.

THE FAT captain meanwhile had rushed back into the caboose, spurred by Jim's frantic plea for help.

“Him kill On Ling!” stammered the excited seaman. “You come quick—Misser Davis him kill On Ling!”

Davis had not killed On Ling, but from the look of things he had winged him briskly on the jaw. Groaning feebly the aged cook sprawled on the floor against the galley wall and rubbed his smitten chin. Davis in pajamas was busy at the copper charcoal stove, his back towards the door.

“What's this?” asked the captain from the doorway.

“I'm making some decent coffee,” answered Davis without looking round.

“Did you strike this cook?” asked the captain slowly.

“I jolly well did,” said the Britisher carelessly, “but not hard enough. I aimed to kill the old fool.”

Calmly enough the captain contemplated the moaning cook and his white assailant for a long minute without speaking. From the doorway Jim stared in on the scene, his shiny yellow face expressionless and emotionless.

Then the rotund captain kneeled on the greasy floor beside the cook, pulled him up into a sitting position, thence helped him to his feet. On Ling groaned a bit but stood steadily enough held by his commander's arm.

“Davis, you did wrong,” said the captain thoughtfully but bluntly. “To abuse a servant is an act of sin.”

“To kick a Chinaman is a deed of sense,” retorted Davis shortly. “I'm not answerable to you.”

“Sir, you are,” contradicted Christianson, and his round face was very stern. “I am the commander of this ship. It is not your place to discipline.”

Davis, his face hot with anger, swung round from the stove and faced the captain.

“Discipline?” he sneered harshly. “What discipline? I've seen no sign of discipline on this ship—your men are a pack of lazy thieves.”

Christianson considered the Britisher's hot insult in his usual thoughtful way.

“It is true that we are undermanned,” he said reasoningly. “The men are overworked, and therefore I give them certain liberties. But they work hard, and they obey orders. If you know of stealing, give me a report that I may take action.”

Davis turned back again to the fire, ignoring the captain's steady tone.

“I can look out for myself,” he snapped. “But you may give warning to your crazy mate and your damned yellow crew. I'm fed up with their interference; I don't intend to have them dogging every step I take

I'm paying a top price for your boat, and I'll have treatment accordingly."

After his customary moment of deliberation, the captain decided against further words. He released his hold on the aged On Ling—by now fully recovered—made his way out of the caboose, walked forward and up the companion to the boat deck. There at his cabin door he stood for a moment looking ruefully down at his white trousers. They were black with dirt at the knees from kneeling to aid the cook.

"Capt'n!" hailed the excited voice of Bill Pike from above. "Come 'ere t' th' bridge. I got news."

"Presently," called back the bulky captain. He unlocked his cabin door, went in, and closed it behind him. Eagerly the First Officer from his post waited and watched for his reappearance. It was a full five minutes before the captain in a fresh white suit came out and made his way upward to the bridge.

"W'at was wrong in th' caboose?" began the mate.

"Davis wanted some good coffee," answered the captain. "So he struck On Ling on the jaw."

"That 'ould make ye 'appy," commented Bill with sarcasm. "Ye thought it was a joke w'en that bloody villain knocked down y'er First Officer."

"On Ling is not a detective," explained the captain. "Therefore I ordered Davis to leave him alone. What was the news you called me for?"

"I seen a stowaway," answered Pike.

"Where?" asked the captain.

"W'en Jim got ye away from goin' in the fo'csle," answered the shambling Mate, "I c'uld see 'e wanted t' keep ye out. So I waited an' watched. When ye was in th' caboose, I seen th' stowaway duck out from th' fo'csle an' run t' th' main deck. By now 'e's 'id in the 'old."

"Are you sure?" cross-questioned the captain. "It may have been one of the crew."

"I know th' crew," said Bill. "It wasn't none o' th' crew. Like enough it's somebody that villain Davis has got on board t' help wreck th' ship."

The redfaced captain smiled disbelievingly at his mate's suggestion.

"You'll have to reason better than that, Bill, if you're going to be a dectective," he said slowly. "For one thing, Davis has leased the ship and is free to bring whom he pleases openly on board. For another, he's not on the best terms with the crew; they'd not aid him with a stowaway. This is some of the crew's own mischief; that much is plain enough."

"W'at's th' idee?" puzzled Pike. "Whoever this 'ere villain is, we got t' run 'im down."

"That will not be easy to do," considered Christianson. "The crew will be of no help, and one of us must stay always on the bridge. One man alone can do naught."

"Get y'er angel friend Davis t' 'elp ye," suggested Pike with sarcasm.

"I will not do that," decided the captain. "I don't like his ways. But we can ask Ching—he's true blue."

"Ching is a 'alf-blood villain," asserted the First Officer. "Ye'll find 'e'll betray ye, sure."

"Bill, don't be such a fool," advised the captain. "Ching is my friend, and I am his. He's a true man."

"Ye'll find out," muttered Pike. "Ye've found out some things already t'day."

The captain leaned across the rail and called down to a passing sailor.

"Ching!" he roared. "Send up Ching!"

"Ching," answered the seaman. "All light," and sped sternward after the engineer.

When Ching reached the bridge, the First Officer was standing over the man at the wheel, so wholly wrapped up in the navigation of the ship that he had no eye for his pet enemy. The big-boned but flabby engineer, his red head bared, took his stand before the captain who was leaning lazily against the port rail.

The glaring morning sunshine brought out startling contrast between the two men —the red-faced captain in spotless white, the engineer in shirt and pants plastered and saturated with grease and dirt, his face as black as coal. An onlooker might have read in Ching's face a look of furtive secretiveness, quite at variance with his fearless fighting Irish features.

"Ye called me," he blurted out in his snarly tenor.

"Ching," began the captain quietly. "There's a stowaway on board."

The Eurasian made no answer. He stood balancing easily with the roll of the ship, looking intently at the captain, his black eyes blinking a bit in the bright sunshine.

"What do you know about him?" continued the captain.

For answer the engineer rushed across the narrow bridge, laid his big greasy hands on Bill Pike, and whirled him round face to face. The First Officer shrank under the onslaught in deathly fear.

"Ye cowardly spy!" falsettoed Ching as he shook his fist under Pike's nose. "What lie are ye blabbin' about me now?"

With a leap of deft quickness the rotund captain thrust his arm between the two tense adversaries.

"Stand back here, you Irishman!" he ordered, and by main weight and strength he pushed the engineer backward to the rail. "Why must you always look for a fight? Listen: No one is accusing you. I tell you there's a stowaway on board, and I ask you what you know. Now answer."

For one fleeting moment the black eyes of the Eurasian, friendly and frank, looked squarely in his captain's face. Then again they clouded over with their habitual expression of furtive evasiveness.

"I know nothin'," he answered sullenly.

"I believe you, Ching," said the captain reasonably. "Now listen: The crew are aiding this stowaway whoever he is. He has been kept hid in the forecastle; now he's in the hold. They'll not aid us in running him down. See what you can do."

"I can't understand a stowaway on this v'y'ge," muttered the Engineer half to himself. "This must be seen to."

"Let me know what you find," ordered the captain.

Ching accepted the implied dismissal and started off the bridge. Two steps down the companion, he paused and swung around.

"Of course," said he. "If I find him, ye'll know. But hark: Keep that —— Bill Pike off my trail. I'm sick of his peekin' around. Davis is sick of it too. If ye don't teach him his place, he'll go over the rail."

With this parting threat he was gone. The captain walked to the starboard rail of the bridge and stood looking off thoughtfully at the distant shimmering coast.

"Well, what d'ye think now?" asked Bill Pike, a touch of triumph in his voice as he came close.

"I'm thinking this is a queer voyage," answered the captain without turning.

"I knowed I'd show ye," said the First Officer self-satisfied.

The captain turned squarely on him.

"Yes," he admitted. "You have. And from now on, Bill Pike, lay off this detective work."

"Good lord!" argued Pike. "Look what's a brewin'. Don't this 'ere ship need no deteckative?"

"Yes," answered the captain. "She does. But, Bill, you're not the man for the job. I'll have to do it myself."

X

AS DIFFIDENT as any country school-boy, the corpulent captain of the *Hshee Chong* made his way into the dining-salon and took his place at the table opposite Davis. For the first time since the voyage began he was embarrassed and ill at ease in the presence of the Britisher; suspicion had taken fresh root in his mind, and breeding distrust had robbed him of poise and assurance.

"A good day," he said shortly and busied himself with his plateful of salt beef, beans and potatoes. In his suit of spotless white he was in sharp contrast to Davis who sat barefooted in soiled silk pajamas.

"A wonderful day!" agreed Davis with most unusual good-nature. "How goes the run?"

"We should make port tomorrow," replied the captain in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Gang Kau?" questioned the Britisher.

"Gang Kau is the port you named," was the brief answer.

"Man, your boat travels!" praised Davis. To the suspicious captain, who knew well enough how slowly the *Hshee Chong* limped along, it seemed as if this unprecedented cordiality was forced and unnatural.

Perhaps Davis was seeking to make amends for the insult of the morning; perhaps he was concealing beneath kind words some purpose still more sinister. It would pay to be watchful.

"Five days, is it not?" he continued. "That shows good seamanship and a good steamer."

"What cargo do we load at Gang Kau?" asked the captain yielding to the curiosity of the seaman.

"We take on my partner," was the answer. "No cargo."

"And then where?" pursued the captain.

"That I'm not saying," replied Davis bluntly yet with good-nature. "There's too much prying and peeking on this ship, my man, to allow me to tell you. I have money up on this voyage, and my success hangs on secrecy; I daren't risk a leak."

The captain stirred his coffee a bit without answering.

"There's improvement in the fare this noon," commented Davis.

"Yes," said the captain thoughtfully. "I believe there is."

"I tell you, it's doing well to be rough with these coolies," affirmed the Britisher argumentatively. "You felt I was hard on your cook this morning, whereas I was but giving him his needed lesson. Could I handle him for a month, he'd turn into a good servant—or else he'd die."

Davis paused for a swallow of his strong whiskey, but the stolid captain vouchsafed no comment.

"For five years I managed the B and B Cotton Mills at Wu Hu," boasted Davis. "Nine hundred coolies were under my fist. I know the way of orientals. During those years I killed an average of three coolies a year. That kept the rest of them quiet and orderly."

"You did wrong," said the captain, his voice cold yet slow and restrained. "Your whole British attitude is wrong. For myself I hold to what I call the American viewpoint—like treatment to all peoples."

"To —— with America!" snapped out Davis. "They're ruining all the business of the orient. The silly fools with their Golden Rule talk are digging their own graves. 'Twas a pair of —— American labor agitators forced me out of my berth at Wu Hu. I say—treat the Chinaman like the dog he is. Hullo—! what's this?"

Down the companion-steps into the salon trotted the seaman, Jim. "You go bridge, all same quick," he said to the captain, and was off again, Christianson at his heels.

"What ho?" panted the commander as he rushed onto the bridge.

"All's well," answered First Officer Bill Pike. "I got an idee."

He buttonholed the curious captain and led him to the far corner of the bridge.

"About that stowaway," he whispered hoarsely.

"Look here, Bill," put in the captain good-humoredly. "Are you still doing detective work?"

"Naw," whispered Pike. "You're to do that, but I'm a tellin' of ye how. Listen: The crew will be a carryin' chow to their stowaway, won't they? Hide yerself in th' hold, Cap'n, and a sailor with a bowl o' rice will lead ye to 'im."

"Bill," approved the captain, "that's a good plan. But, say, would you rather I take the bridge and let you run down this stowaway?"

"He may be bloodthirsty," answered the mate with sudden nervousness. "He'll fight. You go, Cap'n."

"Then I'll do it now," agreed the captain. "The crew are all forward. I'll drop down the rear hatchway."

It was a nervous First Officer who paced the bridge for the next forty minutes. Convulsively he chewed his frayed mustache, fearfully he clenched his dirty hands, apprehensively he hung his head between his awkward shoulders.

A lone sea bird circled thrice around his very head, but he saw it not. Heedless of the course of the ship, he rolled back and forth across the narrow bridge waiting in terror for he knew not what impending doom. Every throb of the engines was the blow of a fist, every lurch of the ship was the leap of fighting men.

Somewhere down in the stinking midnight bowels of the *Hshee Chong* was his captain, struggling, grappling, fighting for very life with unseen horror. Should Christianson be killed, he, Bill Pike, would be alone at the mercy of Ching and Davis. In very desperation he wrung his hands and prayed aloud, till the man at the wheel turned and stared at him in gaping amazement. And always on its southward course rolled and pounded the *Hshee Chong*.

There was sudden stir among the loafing sailors on the forward deck. In chattering excitement they pointed to some happening sternward on the main deck, something invisible from the bridge. Tensely the First Officer grasped the rail and looked for what might be revealed.

Out onto the forward deck staggered the captain; across his shoulder was thrown the limp body of a man whom the fat seaman carried as one might carry a sack of rice.

Bill Pike, watching with all his eyes, saw the captain lay his load down gently face upward on the deck. The senseless body was that of Ching, a great bloody gash across his forehead. Was he merely unconscious, or was he dead? Obedient to their captain's sharp commands, the sailors scampered for first aid—one for water, one for a blanket, one for a steaming pot of tea.

Kneeling on the deck, the captain gently bathed Ching's face, rubbed his hands, opened his shirt and splashed his chest. Presently the curious mate saw the engineer stir, saw him sit up, saw him rise and stand unsteadily, propped by the captain's arm. He was not then dead, probably not even seriously injured. He drank of the steaming tea, talked a bit, then walked off fairly enough towards the stern.

Hardly could Bill Pike control his impatience for the captain to reach the bridge. The stout commander ran up the ladder to the boat deck; but, instead of coming to the bridge, he stood for a moment deliberating, then entered his cabin.

"Allus must put on clean clothes," said Pike disgusted and could do naught but wait. It was another ten minutes before the captain in radiant white stepped out from his cabin and mounted to the bridge.

"Did ye find 'im?" demanded the First Officer. "Tell me, what 'appened to Ching?"

" 'Tis a long tale," began the captain unhurried. "I hid behind some timbers at the main hatchway on the lower deck. 'Twas dusk there, and I was fairly concealed. After a time came tottering On Ling with rice and tea and went down the hatchway into the hold."

"H-m-m," meditated Pike in the meaningful tone of the detective.

"I waited till he came back," went on the captain. "Then I went down the ladder quiet enough into the hold. 'Twas as dark as the pit; I could see naught. I took a dozen steps aft, and he struck at me in the dark."

"The stowaway!" muttered Bill. "What then, Cap'n?"

"I struck back," was the answer. "We grappled, had a bit of tussel in the dark. He was a big man but not too strong. After a minute I ran him against a stanchion and knocked him senseless. Then, as you saw, I bore him on my shoulder to the open air."

"Ching?" said Pike dazed. "W'at mischief was 'e in?"

"Obeying orders," explained the captain. "Looking for the stowaway. Heard me in the dark and thought that I was the man."

" 'E'll feel proper silly now," commented the Mate. "Takin' 'is cap'n fer a stowaway."

"He doesn't know," said the captain. "He thinks the stowaway knocked him out."

"W'ere is 'e now?" asked Pike.

"Back in the hold," was the answer, "ready for the second round. He's a good man, is Ching."

"A —— villain," said Bill Pike. "That's w'at 'e is. W'at course will ye take now, Cap'n?"

"Into port," said Christianson.

"I mean about all this 'ere mischief on board," explained Pike.

"I've decided 'tis mostly your dreaming," said the captain. "The fault with you, Bill, is you have a romantic mind. We'll forget it—unless something new turns up."

"Ye're simple," said the disgusted mate. "W'at 'as my rheumatics got to do with your duty? There's crime on board, I tell ye, an' somethin' ought to be done."

"If you feel that way, Bill," suggested the captain, "go down in the hold yourself and hunt your stowaway."

"You go to blazes," retorted the First Officer.

XI

IT WAS high noon. About the deck were squatted the half-naked Chinese seamen eating their noonday chow—hot rice chopsticked from copper bowls. The captain was whistling on the bridge yet watching keenly his course between high and narrow islands. The ship was chugging along with unchanging sameness, smelling and stinking beneath the tropic sun.

Came sudden breathless voices of anger and of fear.

"What the ——?" the snarly tenor of Ching echoing up the open hatchway from the engine-room.

"Oh, my ——!" the frightened bleating of Bill Pike.

"I'll kill you!" swore the Eurasian.

Up the narrow iron ladder to the salon deck came tearing the lank and agile First Officer. After him scrambled the big but soft-muscled Eurasian. Ching was panting with his pace; Bill Pike ran in fear, but he ran easily.

In speed he was more than a match for his pursuer. Out on to the deck he leaped and tore with the lope of a scared rabbit on up to the boat deck, on up to the captain's bridge. The Engineer did not carry the chase beyond his hatchway; with a muttered curse he turned and made back to his engines.

"Ahoy!" said the fat captain in vast good nature.

"Ching!" grovelled the fugitive; in the one word was a volume.

"Where were you?" demanded the captain.

"In the engine-room," confessed Bill Pike.

"In the engine-room?" repeated the captain. "What were you doing there?"

"Detectin'."

"Bill," said the plump captain, and in his deliberate voice there was an angry impatience most unusual. "You're making a fool of yourself. Detecting! Following honest men about, peeping into their private business like a robber and a thief. Stop it, I say. If you don't, Ching will slash you with a knife; and I'll not much rebuke him if he does."

"I'm ready to stop it," answered the First Officer meekly.

" 'Tis time," scolded the captain.

"I'm ready to stop," amplified Bill Pike, "because now, I got all the evidence I want."

"What evidence have you now?" asked the captain yielding to his curiosity.

"Evidence enough," answered the detective with an air of teasing triumph. "W'at's the use of tellin' it to you? Ye won't believe it; ye'll only laugh."

" 'Tis you who make me laugh," retorted the captain.

"Ye won't allus laugh," predicted Pike with conviction. "Not when the villains begin their work. I have th' evidence, I tell ye. I have letters that Davis wrote to Ching before ever 'e came on board."

The First Officer's words had the ring of truth; the captain gaped in healthy surprise. For a moment the two looked at each other in silence.

"Come, come, here," broke in the voice of Davis. "Come to tiffin."

The Britisher had come unheard halfway up the companion and was standing with his head level with the floor of the bridge.

Back jumped Bill Pike with a frightened air of guilt. The captain's face took on a look of embarrassment. Beyond question he blushed, but on a face so red no blush could show. Davis saw their confusion and stood gazing at them questioningly.

"Tiffin, you say?" spoke up the captain with a great gulp.

"Yes, tiffin," said the intruder. "We want it over with before we enter port."

Freshly shaven was the Britisher and faultlessly attired for going ashore. His fresh tropical tweeds, shining sun-hat and spotless shoes set him forth as a keen-eyed apostle of business—a wholly different being from the churlish toper in soiled pajamas such as he had been during the five-days voyage.

"We were busy with the course," outrageously lied the conscientious captain. "But I can come now as well as later. Hold her in this channel, Bill, there's water a plenty. I'll be back in five minutes."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the Mate. "Don't I know this 'ere coast like a book?"

While the captain, strangely shame-faced and nervous, sat opposite Davis in the dining-salon and mourned his lie and speechlessly gulped his muddy coffee, Bill Pike talked easily with Jim who held the wheel.

"Me all same tell true?" asked the sailor.

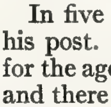
"I reckon ye did," answered Bill. "I found the letters w'ere ye said."

"You pay me five dollars," suggested Jim.

"By 'n' by," temporized the First Officer. "I ain't read 'em yet. Watch your course, man; starb'd a bit!"—and he kept Jim so busy with fine points of helmsmanship that the sailor had no chance to argue for his earned reward.

In five minutes the captain was back at his post. Pike, going below, called loudly for the aged "boy" to serve him in his cabin; and there he locked himself in for a thrilling hour and studied his pilfered letters.

When he came out and went back to the bridge, the ship was coming in close to shore; the captain was wholly absorbed in keeping a true course; there was no time for the two to confer. What Bill Pike might have told his captain remained untold.



BY MID-AFTERNOON the *Hshee Chong* had come to anchor in the harbor of Gang Kau—a wide half-moon of water sheltered by encircling islands. No other steamers were in the port. A brace of bulging-eyed, high-pooped Chinese junks swung idly at anchor near the shore; and a hundred of noisy rowboats, bedecked with painted jaws and eyes, circled round the newcomer, their near-naked owners clamoring in unintelligible colloquialism for business.

Along the low shore lay a long white

Chinese building with flaring roof, part inn, part temple, part warehouse; other buildings there were none. Such intermittent commerce as went through the harbor was borne from the city three miles inland on the swaying backs of countless coolies.

Before the engines had fairly stopped and the anchor was down, the sailors had hung a stout rope ladder over the side. At the bottom of the ladder flocked a great swarm of the harbor sampans begging for passengers.

Oddly enough, not one of these floating vagrants ventured to climb the ladder and come aboard; possibly they had had experience with the fat captain of the *Hshee Chong* on other voyages and had learned to keep their place.

From the bridge the captain and Bill Pike saw Davis come up from the saloon a trim cool figure in grey and swarm down the ladder into the nearest boat. Up from his hatchway without so much as a "by your leave" climbed Ching in soiled blue coat and much-battered pith hat and was down the ladder behind Davis. The twain were off for the shore, leaving the two officers on the bridge gaping like very ninnies.

"Ching?" said the captain incredulous.

"Ching!" repeated Bill Pike in triumph. "I told ye so."

"Ching has a right to go ashore," rallied the captain weakly.

"Read this then," said the First Officer shoving a letter into the captain's hand.

With his great red hands Christianson unfolded the letter and began to read. He read much the same as he talked, slowly and deliberately, going back to re-read many sentences. Gradually his face clouded, his hands clenched on the paper. He finished and pressed his hand to his forehead uncomprehending.

"I told ye so," ventured Bill Pike.

"Ching," said the captain dazed. "I was good to you. I thought you were decent."

"I told ye so," reiterated Bill Pike.

The captain whirled on him, his face white with wrath.

"Oh, be still!" he cried. "You're a fool. Be still! Let me think."

Bill stood his ground; he understood that Christianson's wrath was not at him so much as at the threat of the letter. The Captain paced back and forth across the bridge, his head bowed, his fists clenched, striving to control himself enough to think things through. After many minutes he turned with a jerk and started down the companion toward his cabin.

"What'll ye do?" demanded the First Officer on fire with suspense.

The captain raised his head.

"I'll show them," he said with fierceness. "They'll find they're dealing with Ole Christianson. I'll beat them yet."

He went on down to his cabin. The Mate heard the bolt click; the captain had barred himself in to privacy. Lonesomely Bill gazed about. On the tiny forward deck the crew were squatted in whispered conference. The water of the harbor was a rippling mirror; the two distant junks, built like the caravels of Columbus, swung lazily at their anchors; the green and peaceful shores shimmered in the intolerable heat of the summer sun.

The First Officer took his glasses and busied himself in seeking to pick out the occasional slow-moving figures along the shore. He saw things of interest, yet he yearned intolerably to have by his side the strong presence of his captain.

"We'll 'ave to fight," he muttered to himself many times; and for the first time in his life he felt that perhaps he might have in his soul the temper of conflict.

After what may have been an hour, the seaman Jim, his tarry queue coiled round his head, bare-trunked and bare-legged, wearing naught but short blue cotton pants, ran up to the boat deck and knocked at the captain's door.

XII

THE fat captain of the *Hshee Chong* sat for a very long time on the bunk in his stuffy cabin, his head between his hands, unmindful of the stifling tropic heat.

It could hardly be said that he was thinking. He was more in the mood of one who had been dazed by a knockout blow coming back slowly to consciousness and to pain. The blow had been spiritual—to his mind and his heart; his inner response was not yet one of heated anger; his thoughts were somehow cold and deadened and numb. He was endeavoring to realize the unbelievable.

He had been a fool to buy a share in the *Hshee Chong*. Li Han was a scoundrel—but, then, all men were scoundrels. Bill

Pike was a cowardly good-for-nothing. Ching was—his thoughts grew riotous—Ching had betrayed him. He had picked Ching from the gutter; he had seen love and loyalty glow in the Eurasian's sombre eyes as together they had fought through storm seas. Ching had betrayed him; it was unbelievable!

He was no good as a captain; he had been a fool to buy a share in the *Hshee Chong*—a silly fool led astray by the proud desire to ride through Shanghai in his own ricksha and be called Captain in deference. The *Hshee Chong* was a worn-out steamer—but she was too good to be scuttled. He had good plans for the *Hshee Chong*—rebuilt engines, passenger cabins—there was an opening for a good little passenger boat on the China coast. This was shady business he was on in Gang Kau—he deserved to be punished for mixing in it.

The blinding sunlight that filtered in through his grated window struck him with sudden irritation. He rose with angry impulse to shut out this unwelcome light. A good sign this—his anger at a triviality; his mind was coming out of its daze.

Through the window he caught sight of the shore, intensely green in the brightness. He stood gazing, his mind again gone numb. It would be good to wander alone over green hills, beneath green trees. Somewhere on that shore was Davis in smooth tropical tweeds and shining sun-hat. He understood now the mystery of Davis—Davis was the Devil. Perhaps Ching had sold himself to the Devil—at least he had gotten a hold on Ching—subtle tie of evil between two so dissimilar.

—— Ching for a traitor!

He turned from the window and strode across to the wall where were tacked three or four photographs. One of a woman simple and plain of face he passed by unseeing. Beside it hung a pair of pictures taken once in Hong Kong Harbor by a wandering Chinese photographer: the one a view of captain and mate on the bridge of the *Hshee Chong*—the other of Ching blinking beside his hatchway. Furiously he jerked Ching from the wall, tore him into bits, ground him underfoot. His head grew suddenly hot; the air before him swam red. Fury of pain!

Half-blind he reached out for some object on which to vent his wrath. He caught the huge round watch that hung ticking against the wall and dashed it down in childish viking fury; seized a coat that lay upon his washstand and ripped it angrily into pieces. As he reached forth again in blind madness, his hand lighted on the most cherished of all his possessions—his Bible. His fierceness flew away ashamed; in his ears he heard the rustle of the wings of Peace.

His eyes looked up at the wall and read the verse that he had once paid two dollars to have painted there—the words of the Psalmist on the deep sea:

"He maketh the storm a calm so that the waves thereof are still."

God was the right; He had eyes with which He saw, a right hand in which He swung the sword of wrath. He was a jealous God; one could not serve God and mammon. Yes, he was being punished; he had sold his ship for the promise of ten thousand dollars—sold it for evil use and cargo. It was for him now to repent, bending low at the very foot of the Cross. God, Who was Mercy, would forgive.

God was a God of battle. What was it that David had said?—Ah, yes: "He teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight." It was God's will that his followers should fight. Always had the captain fought his way; he had fought through blows and poverty and sickness and storm; and now he must fight again. It would be a good fight and God was with him; in the prospect of battle his spirit won back its peace.

He must make his plans. Bill would stand by him, yet Bill was less than a broken reed. Who were his foes? Ching! Davis! Yes, they must be conquered first. He was not afraid. And then Li Han—there was a foe more subtle. Li Han was plotting mysterious villainy that must be anticipated and met. Again the captain sat down on his bunk and bowed his head between his hands; but now his mind was active and alert, concentrating on ways and means to defeat his foes.

There came a tapping at his cabin door. He rose and opened the door. Outside stood the seaman, Jim.

"What's wrong?" asked the captain resenting interruption at the very moment of mental victory.

"All right," responded Jim cheerfully. "Everything all right."

He stood half-embarrassed but very radiant, beaming in most un-Chinese manner upon his captain.

"What do you want?" demanded Christianson.

"All men talk much," answered Jim. "All talk same, all think same. Me come tell you they say what?"

"Well, say it," ordered the commander sharply. The most he could get from Jim's prelude was preliminary warning of a walkout or a strike. Let it come, then; since he must fight, let his foes increase.

Jim stuttered and struggled for words; his English took in no more than the concrete things of the ship; he knew not how to essay the abstract.

"You good capt'n," he came forth with triumph. "All time steer straight, talk straight, give men good chow. All men say you good capt'n."

He paused for a renewal of inspiration and scratched a flea-bite on his naked leg.

"Well, what?" pursued the captain.

"You no be 'flaid," resumed the sailor in tones of encouragement. "All men say, tell you no be 'flaid. No be 'flaid Ching, no be 'flaid Davis, no be 'flaid any —— thing. All men help you very good. You savvy?"

"Oh!" said the captain in complete surprise. "Oh! All right, Jim, I understand. I'm not afraid. We'll beat them yet."

"All light," beamed Jim and turned to leave.

"Wait, Jim," called the captain. "Have a man ready to take a letter ashore. I'll write it at once. Letter to Shanghai; must go, sure."

"Can do," agreed Jim and retired to the forecastle.

Fifteen minutes later, having seen a sailor go over the side with the freshly written letter, the captain mounted calmly to the bridge.

"Capt'n," said Bill Pike eagerly. "I got an idee."

"You have too many ideas lately, Bill," said the captain as sweetly as if he had not just come from an hour of agony with his soul.

"They come true, don't they?" demanded the mate.

"But I wish they didn't," countered the captain. "What's your idea this time, Bill?"

"My idee is thet we h'ist anchor right now and go to Shanghai," elucidated the First Officer. "Leave them two bloomin' pirates marooned on this here 'eathen shore."

"Your idea is no good," decided the captain in his good-natured voice.

"An' why not?" demanded Bill argumentatively.

"Who'll run our engines?" asked the captain. "You know that second engineer couldn't keep them going for a day; he's naught but a dumb Chinaman."

"I didn't think o' that," confessed Bill, "but like enough I could," he volunteered.

"More likely you couldn't," retorted the fat captain as he leisurely tamped his pipe with strong tobacco. "There's no man on earth can make those engines go save Ching. We both know that. And there's a second reason why your idea is no good."

"What d'ye mean?" demanded Bill as he nervously fingered the wheel.

"Eight thousand dollars," answered the captain. "Davis placed it in the bank, payable to me on the completion of this voyage."

"Which he plotted ye'd never complete," put in the mate.

"Exactly," agreed the captain. "Nevertheless I intend to have that money. Therefore I must complete the voyage."

"Ye're a fool," sputtered the First Officer. "How can ye complete a v'y'ge after ye're knocked in the head?"

"We'll do the knocking," explained the captain. "I'm prepared. Look here." He pulled back his coat and displayed a huge revolver strapped to his massive hip.

"I don' like fightin'," confessed Bill. His frayed mustache worked, and his brow wrinkled as he turned over the fearful thought. "See here, Capt'n, my idee is better," he argued. "Leave these villains right where they be. We'll make Shanghai somehow, and then w'at's to prevent your takin' the eight thousan' dollars?"

"My conscience," said the captain slowly, "and my word. I agreed first to complete the voyage."

"Thunderin' moon!" said the disgusted mate. "Who in —— expects ye to be honest with a pirate like Davis?"

"No one does in ——," replied the captain solemnly. "But God in Heaven does. Him do I trust, and Him will I obey."

"Well," gave up the First Officer, "If ye won't hear to sense, I can't make ye. Good-by."

He started down the companion.

"Where to, Bill?" questioned his commander.

The mate paused and looked back.

"I'm goin' to my cabin," he answered. "I'm a goin' to strap a revolver to one hip an' a knife to the other. In my pocket I'm a goin' to put a Bible an' a book o' hymns. If ye say fight, I'll have to fight."

"Good for you, Bill!" praised the captain. "We'll make a man out of you after all. Only remember—we're not to start the fight. Let them strike the first blow."

Slowly and disgustedly the mate climbed back to the bridge. He stood looking hopelessly off at the outlying islands, his mouth and hands working pathetically.

The captain took his pipe from his mouth and meditatively blew out a mighty throatful of smoke.

"What is it, Bill?" he asked with curiosity.

The First Officer swung round impatiently. In his eyes was the glint of tears.

"The first blow!" he cried bitterly. "The first blow! I thought I c'uld fight, but now I know I can't. Not when the other feller strikes th' first blow."

"Well, why?" asked the bewildered captain. "That always gets me to going."

"'Cos then I'm licked," confessed the mate. "I was born that way. I allus was, an I allus will be."

The captain reached forward and placed his huge red hand on his mate's shoulder.

"Bill," said he with unusual gentleness. "That's the most like a man you've ever talked. Cheer up, mate, we'll beat them yet."

XIII

BUT a little way above the *Hshee Chong* hung the full moon—the great, bright moon of semi-tropic Asia making midnight more luminous than ever high noon in the man-made cañons of New York. By such a light could one read; of such mystic brightness must one beware—wherefore the crew slept sheltered in the forecastle, the captain in his cabin.

Bill Pike watched alone upon the bridge. He had watched thus for three long hours, instructed to wake his captain instantly upon the return of the conspirators. But they had not returned. Assuredly now they would not return till daybreak. The harbor boatmen, who must bring them back, slept safe at anchor, nor would they waken for any calling from the shore.

Greatly relaxed from the tense terror of the day that had gone, the First Officer yawned as he leaned against the rail and gazed idly at the fairy shores of this moon-wrought land. Afar the two Chinese junks swung in the strange white light like anchored ghosts. Sometimes from the shore came the yowling prayer of a sleepless dog. Once a huge night bird winged its way across the face of the moon. Other motion there was not, nor sound; all was infinite peace. Bill Pike yawned more deeply, leaned in heavier content against the rail. His eyes closed at intervals for bits of dream to dance across his mind.

A ray of moonlight like a sweaty snake swung down from the brightness and clutched him by the throat. He pulled his head back to break loose; the choking light tightened its grip. "Capt'n," he whined. "Capt'n." He woke in terror; harsh hands at his neck pulled him off the rail, flung him with a bang to his back upon the deck.

"Got you, you white-eyed skunk," snarled Ching and seated his crushing weight upon Bill's ribs.

"Help!" squeaked the frightened mate. "Help! Capt'n!"

"Shut up, you fool!" ordered the engineer and struck the prostrate man sharp on the face. Bill groaned himself into silence, and lay in weakness of spirit, his eyes closed, dreading death.

"See if he's armed," snapped the voice of Davis. "We found two revolvers on Christianson."

Pike opened his eyes from a season of despairing prayer to see a little ring of men about—in the foreground Davis, behind him a half-dozen men barefooted and bareheaded, in ragged gray-blue uniforms, their waists wound with cartridges, rifles in their hands—lawless soldiers of China.

"Where's the capt'n? Did you hurt him?" demanded Ching in his snarly tenor, shifting his position on Pike's chest to one more oppressive.

"Pounded him a bit till he gave in," said Davis. "'Twas easy enough; we caught him fast asleep. He's locked now in his cabin with a man on guard—he'll not get out."

"That's right," approved Ching. "If we killed him now, we'd have trouble t' handle the crew. This —— mate, though, I'd like t' skin alive." In sheer wantonness he gave Bill's nose a bloody pull and stuck a filthy thumb hard in his eye.

"Stop!" squeaked the tortured seaman. "Help! Help!"

"Hold on here, man," ordered Davis. "We'll need this chap to help with the navigation."

"Don' I know it?" retorted Ching. "I'm just a scarin' him—givin' him the fear o' hell. I'm teachin' him what'll happen if he don't walk straight."

"Oh, he'll give no trouble," said Davis carelessly. "He's a coward born. When he takes the bridge, we'll have a soldier behind him with a gun. He'll walk straight enough."

"Men all much 'fraid," broke in a third voice. "I talk 'em turkey, knock two of 'em down, make 'em 'fraid."

Suave and agreeable in tone was this voice—the voice of a Chinaman confident of his English. With his uninjured eye the prostrate First Officer caught a glimpse of the speaker—a short, thickset man dressed in white cotton who had come to the bridge leading Jim and another cowering seaman each by an ear. Something very familiar there was about the voice and countenance of this newcomer to Bill Pike; but he was unable to recognize him.

"Good work!" praised Davis. "When do you want to sail?"

"All right now," was the answer. "Quicker go, quicker come."

"Right 'o," agreed the Britisher briskly. "Here, Ching, I'll handle this man; you go to your engines."

The big Eurasian sprang to his feet.

"You a-givin' me orders?" he asked hotly.

"I am," said Davis coldly. "I said: go to your engines."

"Shut y'er mouth!" snarled Ching. "I take no orders from you, you crook; I'm in equal command."

He stood for the moment half a head above Davis, snarling and threatening.

With a drive of wonderful quickness the Englishman swung out his fist and caught the big engineer square on his bull neck. He dropped like a stone to the deck. Before he could rise, the thickset Chinaman, who held the two seamen, issued a brisk and voluble command to the group of soldiers. Three of them seized Ching and dragged him to his feet, then roughly off the bridge toward the engine-room.

"That is good," commented the Chinese commander pleasantly. "He learn place very quick. Now, Mr. Davis, you take Pike, I get under way. All right?"

"Quite," agreed Davis shortly. "Here, you brute, stand up." He yanked the First Officer roughly to his feet. "Get off the bridge," he ordered. "Get to your cabin."

Down the companion through the bright moonlight stumbled Bill Pike sobbing in cowardly impotent anger. He heard Davis pull to and lock the cabin door. He was a prisoner.

In utter collapse he dropped on the edge of his bunk and sat there for many minutes. Through the night stillness he heard familiar sounds—the rattling of chains, the taking in of the anchor and the chug of the engines as the *Hshee Chong* got under way. Common, everyday sounds they were, strangely at variance with the tragedy that had thus overtaken a humdrum merchantman.

After a long time Bill sat up straighter and began to consider. After all, his life was not in immediate danger; there might still be hope. Not three feet away, he reflected, was his captain; one thin panel of painted board was all that separated the two cabins. What lot was the captain's—was he conscious or unconscious, was he beaten or was he undiscouraged? Filled with the thought, the mate reached out his hand and gave three knocks against the frail bulkhead. Back came three answering knocks—sound that to the First Officer spoke courage and hope. Cowardly pessimist though he was, he could not conceive of his captain as aught save a conqueror. If they could but confer together, they might find way to match their captors.

Bill Pike opened his pocket-knife and, low behind his bunk where it would be unseen from the door, he began to cut a tiny opening through into the captain's cabin.

XIV

"HIST, Capt'n, are ye there?" hoarsely whispered Bill Pike.

"Right here, Bill," came back the cautious answer.

"I'm a still doin' deteckative work," announced the First Officer.

It was mid-afternoon and a full week later. The *Hshee Chong*, rolling hardly at all, was pounding along over a sea of ominous smoothness. Bill Pike, but freshly brought back and locked in from his forced turn upon the bridge, was seeking conference with his prisoned captain.

He lay on his side upon his bunk, his mouth close to the narrow hole he had hewn through the bulkhead. Beyond the wall, as he knew, the captain likewise lay—their heads barely a foot apart. They had conversed thus often in secret during their imprisonment, their voices drowned beneath the noises of the ship, unsuspected by their captors.

"What have you found today?" asked the captain eagerly. He was in no mood now to make jest of Pike's detecting; he was hungry and thirsty for the least scrap of news, chafing nervously in his solitary confinement.

" 'Ere and there a bit," answered Bill. "We're a runnin' into a typhoon fer one thing; the glass is droppin' like a stone."

" 'Tis in the air," commented the captain. "I have the uneasy feel of it in my chest; 'twill be a bad one. Can this Chinaman manage a ship?"

" 'E knows navigation," admitted the mate grudgingly. "Leastwise 'e can hold a course an' 'e knows th' Chiny coast. I'd hate to trust 'im with it a blowin' ——. Id on' like 'im; he's so blame big an' condescendin' like 'e owned the hull seven seas."

The two men lay a bit, panting in the still and tensioned air like spent runners or like those overcome upon an airless mountain peak.

"Have you found who he is?" asked the captain presently.

"I heard 'is name today," said Pike. "It's Wang. That's the most I c'n tell."

"There was a Wang in command of the *Chekiang* last year when she was wrecked," said the captain. "Is that the man?"

"Oh lord, yes!" exclaimed Bill with sudden illumination. "I knowed all the while I'd seen 'im, but I couldn't remember. I know now; he did command the *Chekiang;* I saw 'im once in Tsingtao."

" 'Twas suspected that the wreck was deliberate," mused the captain. "I heard plenty of gossip at the time. She struck a reef at midday in fair weather. But the insurance companies could prove nothing and had to pay. At the time it was whispered that he'd have trouble to get another command; no company would insure a boat with him as captain."

" 'E got this command easy, the —— pirate," said Pike. " 'E got it 'cos 'e knows how to wreck a ship."

"He'll lose it again," predicted the captain grimly. "Man, what would I give for a turn on deck; I'm choking for air."

"It's the glass," said Bill. "Th' sea is a broodin' still."

"Tell me again about our cargo," commanded Christianson impatiently.

"We was two days at Formosa," began the mate with the naive gusto innate in every seaman—happy to tell with patience the same unvaried story forty times. "Loaded rifles to stock an army. Heaviest cargo th' ol' *Hshee Chong* ever had an' badly placed at that; if they start slidin' in a blow, we'll roll clean over. I don't like it, I say."

"Who bossed the loading?" asked the captain—a question he had put with true sailorman ingenuousness at each new telling of the tale.

"Davis mostly, th' dirty villain," answered Pike. "Leastwise Jim told me so. Ye remember they kep' me locked up, Capt'n, all th' time we was in port—afeard I'd make 'em trouble. They——"

"Now Bill, be straight," interrupted the captain with a touch of his old-time play. "You know that nobody's afraid of you."

"Wang was busy a takin' on coal," ignored Bill with dignity. " 'E left th' loadin' of the cargo to Davis. 'Twas done by a greenhorn, say I. The hull for'd deck piled with boxes of iron. We're a sailin' with our bows down like a bloodhound. A bit of a gale with a choppy sea an' head-first we go, down to Davy Jones' locker."

"'Tis more than a bit of gale that's coming with this air," panted the captain. " 'Tis a very inferno. But poor Ching! So they couldn't trust him to take on coal. Poor Ching!"

"They kept 'im fast in the engyne-room," related the First Officer, "with a pair of murderin' soldiers watchin' to shoot 'im down. 'E's sick of 'is bargain, is Ching. 'E was to go shares with Davis an' Wang, an' now they've made 'im a slave."

"I wonder he'll run his engines," puzzled the captain.

"W'ot else c'n 'e do with a gun at 'is head?" demanded Pike.

"Ching is not like you, Bill," said the captain bluntly. "He's half Irish; no gun at his head could force him to work unwilling. There's something deeper here than appears."

"Anyway 'e's sick of 'is lot," continued Pike. "Jim told me today—"

"How can you talk so much with Jim?" asked the captain. "Aren't you under guard when on the bridge?"

"So I can't when Davis or Wang's about," explained Bill patiently—for perhaps the twentieth time. "But mostly they go below to 'ave a drink an' leave a bloomin' bandit on guard who can't talk no English. Then I c'n talk a bit with Jim at th' wheel—th' guard thinks we're a-navigatin' the ship."

"'Tis a wonder the crew wouldn't seek to desert at Formosa," remarked the captain seeking to forget the heated breathless stillness of the air in continued conversation.

"Jim says, 'Capt'n good man,'" related Pike. "'No c'n run 'way, leave capt'n,' says 'e. Besides they was all under guard—no chance to leave."

"What do they say about Ching?" pursued Christianson.

"They hate 'im like sin," answered the mate, "same as they allus have. But Jim says today when you want t' break out an' fight, Ching'll help ye. 'E got it from th' second engineer."

"I want none of his help," said the captain with decision.

"'E's a —— villain," seconded Pike, "like I allus said. 'E's a gettin' a villain's reward. 'E thought to make 'is fortune, but Davis an' Wang will drown 'im with the rest of us when they scuttle the ship."

"They 'll not do that at once?" queried the captain suggesting fresh details for the mate's prolix tongue.

"Four er five v'yges they means to make," expatiated Pike. "They have two godowns full of rifles in Formosa to bring across. A nice fortune they'll get f'r their dirty work; I wouldn't wonder they'll get fifty thousan' dollars."

"Who 's a paying them?" egged on the Captain.

"Some gen'r'l in South China," was the answer. "'Tain't f'r me to remember 'is 'eathen name. 'E's goin' to start a big new revolution."

"There are fifty revolutions in China already," reflected the captain. "Another, more or less, will make little difference. But this chap, whoever he is, must have money behind him."

"'E must have t' pay a nice bribe t' them Japs to clear 'is cargo out o' their port," reasoned Bill.

"Perhaps not so much," said the captain. "The Japs are glad enough to help start new revolutions in China. Still 'tis no safe task to run arms across this channel. A dozen gunboats are watching this coast for contraband."

"They'd never look f'r it on the *Hshee Chong*," put in Pike.

"That's the idea," agreed the captain. "'Twas clever to steal a vessel that bore an honest name to cover their dirty work. And the thing that hurts is to think they plan to sink a good ship with all on board to cover their crime. They'll have a fight first—they'll have a fight."

The captain gritted his teeth in true viking rage. Save for the ceaseless pounding of the engines it was very still on the *Hshee Chong;* she might have been drifting on a mill-pond, so sinister was the stillness.

"They's six armed soldiers on board," cautioned the fearful First Officer, "besides Davis an' this 'ere Wang. "Ye can't win, Capt'n; they'll shoot ye like a dog."

"I'll have your revolver," said the captain. "'Twas luck you had one hid under your bunk. I'll do my shooting first—the beasts!"

"How ye goin' to get out?" asked Pike curiously.

"They were careless to leave me my chest of tools," whispered the captain. "I hadn't told you that before, had I, Bill? On those windy nights when you were on the bridge, I've been a sawing at this bulkhead between our cabins. When the time comes, I can push the whole thing down. Some day, when they come after you, we'll dash out your door together and shoot."

"An' get shot," predicted Pike. "Th' crew would be glad to help ye, but w'ot c'n they do unarmed? Lord, Capt'n such air!" he panted with a sudden change of subject. "I can't breathe."

"The bottom has dropped out of the glass," said the captain. "It's worse the last minute—it's like the tops of the Andes."

For a moment the two lay gasping in their stuffy cabins, overcome by the brooding breathlessness of the air.

"Listen!" called the captain and leaped to his feet. "Hear that!"

From afar there came an onrushing sound—like thunder, but more terribly intense—like a Niagara's roar, but with a voice more ominous—like a mighty rushing wind, a hundred mighty winds rolled into one overwhelming avalanche of air. And then, with a giant swoop it came upon them—a great sweeping resistless wall of wind and water with voice terrific, striking the *Hshee Chong* with the mighty hammer of Thor—hurling her off-keel as a child might push a whittled toy.

"God!" whispered Bill Pike with all a seaman's fierce awe at the passion of Nature. "God! The typhoon!"

XV

BILL PIKE, who would have trembled at a mouse, balanced with careless ease on the slanting quivering floor of his cabin and listened to the howl of the storm as a music-lover might thrill to the thunder of Beethoven. Of the wind and sea he was unafraid.

What running and shouting there might have been on the deck without he could not tell—all other sound was drowned in the might of the storm. After the first portentous blow, the steamer had been swung round to run with the wind; and now, her bow fairly under water, her deck slanted at a fearful angle, she raced forward with the storm as if at any moment she might dive headlong down.

"Fool!" muttered the First Officer in measureless contempt of Wang's seamanship. "W'y didn't 'e head agin 'er! We can't do this."

After the first minutes of onslaught came a lull—a lull that is only by comparison. The typhoon was a shade less intense, the steamer rode higher in the water; yet the storm was terrific still, the ship borne along always as on the lift of one great doom-bound wave. In such typhoons come often these brief let-ups to be followed shortly by blows more terrible.

"Oh, my ——!" squawked Bill Pike, and his eyes bulged out in unbelief. The solid wall built in between his cabin and the captain's heaved over upon him. He threw out his hands to protect himself, backed forward against his barred door—then, reassured, he saw and understood.

The imprisoned captain under cover of the storm had completed the tedious task of sawing out the bulkhead; and stood now above the wall he had thrown down, grinning sociably upon his First Officer. Very dirty was Christianson, his white suit rumpled and soiled, his round face long unshaven. He shouted, but his words were unheard above the storm.

Without warning the door of the captain's cabin swung open. In the doorway appeared the last man on earth that the two imprisoned seamen could have thought to see—cotton-clad Sam Thom, fat ship-chandler of Shanghai, in each of his two hands a huge revolver.

Up to the captain he rushed, balancing awkwardly to the lurch of the ship, and thrust one of the weapons into Christianson's bewildered hand.

"Come! Quick!" he bellowed. "Shoot! Kill! Save ship!"

The captain with Bill Pike at his heels ran out onto the deck. Had the ship not been riding with the wind, they could not have held their feet; even as it was, they had constantly to grip the hand-rails with one hand or the other to keep from going overboard.

In the scuppers lay a pair of the ragged Chinese soldiers as they had rolled lifeless when shot down by Sam Thom. To the rail clung Jim and another seaman, each armed with a sharp knife; they grinned glad welcome to their freed commander.

"Davis?" with his mouth close to Sam's ear, the captain's shouted question was but a whisper against the thunder of the wind. The ship-chandler pointed downward toward the dining-salon. Christianson, holding his feet with infinite strength and difficulty, made headway round the corner of his cabin, thence down the companion into the salon.

Davis with his head between his hands was seated at the long dining-table; an empty whisky-bottle and glass rolled against the table-rail, vibrating with the throb of the storm.

"Got you!" bellowed the angry seaman. The Britisher looked up, sprang warily to his feet—to take a blow on his face from the captain's huge red fist—a blow that flung him the full length of the narrow salon. He lay bloody of nose, half-senseless, uncomprehending.

The captain stooped, lifted his foe with both hands, flung him into the nearest cabin, and locked the door.

"You'll keep till later," he promised himself grimly; and made his way out of the salon, sternward round the corner of the store-room, when, fighting his way on hands and knees inch by inch against the wind up the slanting deck, he reached the open hatchway and climbed boldly down to the engine-room.

He stood for a moment in the doorway and took in the scene in the dim light of the swinging lamp—Ching, dirty as of yore, standing sullen before the ancient engines that were pounding on with dogged faithfulness, a pair of barefoot soldiers seated safe on the floor on guard with rifles across their knees.

Simultaneously the three spied the fat captain, his revolver in his hand. The two soldiers grasped their rifles in futile alarm. Ching's somber face lighted with a look of fighting Irish joy; as the captain winged one soldier with a shot from his revolver, the engineer sprang like a cat upon the other, gripped the surprised Chinaman's throat, choked him till his eyes popped and his tongue hung out, choked him into unconsciousness. Then he rose and faced the captain, his usually brooding eyes aflash with welcome.

"Good—" he began but said no more; the Captain's fist caught him square on the jaw and dropped him to the floor.

"Get to your engines!" howled the fighting commander. "I'll deal with you later."

Ching looked up, on his face a thoroughly happy grin all void of resentment.

"All right," he agreed. "I'll keep 'em goin', Capt'n; we'll save the ship."

Taking none of his usually deliberate time to puzzle over the engineer's words, the captain rushed from the engine-room, up the hatchway to the deck, then on hands and knees forward and upward to the bridge.

Pike had preceded him. On hands and knees, holding himself tense against the driving of the wind, the lank and nervous First Officer had climbed the companion following the gestured lead of Jim and his fellow seaman. He had been in time to see the pair pounce upon the navigator Wang, who—aside from the man at the wheel—was alone on the bridge, knife him with repeated bloody thrusts, and heave him bodily over the rail into the sea.

Despite all the uplifting thrill and excitement of the typhoon, the sight of spurting blood threw Pike into shuddering nausea.

"Blood an' blazes!" he muttered presently. "If this ship ain't ——." Then his sickness passed, and he faced the storm, unfearing and alert.

The man at the wheel waved welcome through the blackness of the wind. Jim and his companion made their way below; First Officer, Bill Pike, was in charge of the *Hshee Chong*.

Shortly the fat Captain joined him on the bridge. The two looked at the compass, the glass, the waves, the travel of the ship, making gestures one to another such as only fellow-seamen understand. The *Hshee Chong* had suffered from the blow—the starboard boat had been carried away, the loose cargo on the forward deck had shifted into a tangled heap on the port side. The wind was terrific.

The captain put his mouth close to his mate's listening ear.

"I'll take the bridge," he shouted against the roar of the storm. "You take the rest of the men and get that cargo off the forward deck."

"Ay, ay, sir," yelled the First Officer. "An' where'll I shift 'er to?"

"Overboard and to ——!" swore the pious captain — into the very teeth of the god of the elements.

"Ay, ay, Sir," agreed Pike, then unconsciously he repeated Ching's words spoken a few minutes before. "Ay, ay, Capt'n; we'll save th' ship."

XVI

TYPHOONS have a way of blowing themselves out. The storm which had struck the *Hshee Chong* blew like an inferno for forty hours, during the last twenty of which the tiny steamer took refuge in doubtful comfort behind a snug little island.

Then came the terrific drenching rain that follows always after the wind; and then, aside from a brisk and choppy sea, the storm was over. The sun shone overhead, the air was inspiringly mild. The *Hshee Chong* limped forth from her shelter unconcerned and pounded off northward toward Shanghai.

On the bridge the fat captain, resplendent in white, his red face freshly shaven, yawned lazily and contentedly. In common with all the crew he was very tired. For two days and nights there had been scant sleep, it had taken every ounce they could put forth to pull to safety through the storm. Now, for the first time, the commander had leisure to think of matters outside the actual navigation of the ship.

As he thought, he became more and more curious. There had things happened on board for which he must have explanation. He leaned over the rail and bellowed at the decks below.

"Jim," he thundered. "Send Jim."

Presently Jim came; barefooted and bare-trunked in his inevitable blue overalls, he stood before the captain, swaying easily with the chop of the deck and grinning most amiably.

"Jim," demanded the captain. "Where is Sam Thom?"

The sailor looked starboard and port and aft, but saw no way of evasion.

"Sam Thom fo'csle," he admitted.

"I want to see him," said the captain. "Send him up."

"No can do," suggested Jim. "Him very sick."

"Seasick?" asked the captain.

"Yes," was the answer. "Him very seasick; no can eat, no can walk, no can drink tea."

"The fresh air will help him," said the Captain. "Bring him up here. If he can't walk, carry him."

"Can do," conceded the sailor and went below.

Sam Thom made shift to stagger up the companion to the bridge leaning on Jim's arm, but it was manifest truth that the fat ship-chandler had been very seasick indeed. His face was a bilious yellow, and the whites of his eyes were much in evidence. He collapsed entirely when he reached the bridge and sat down flat on the deck, nursing his stomach with his pudgy hands. The captain towered above him in immaculate white like a well-fed red-faced angel of judgment.

"Sam," demanded Christianson with a great attempt to be stern. "What business have you on my ship?"

"Me save ship," pleaded the ship-chandler reviving a bit in the fresh breeze.

"I know you did," said the captain. "That's why I'm not having you dumped overboard. But now tell me the truth: what made you come on board?"

"You no fool," praised Sam sitting up straighter and looking ineffably good-natured and innocent.

"Sometimes I am," mused the captain. "Now listen, Sam; was it Li Han who hired you to come on this voyage?"

"No can tell," replied Sam Thom too confused at this sudden shot to have ready a plausible lie.

"What was the plan?" pursued the captain. "To have you dump Davis and me overboard and take the *Hshee Chong* back to Shanghai? How much did he promise to pay?"

"Li Han bad man," began the ship-chandler. Much recovered in the fresh air he scrambled to his feet and stood uncertainly, grasping the rail. "Him very bad man; you good man; me good man. Maybe Li Han want kill you, no can tell. Maybe I say 'all right,' fool Li Han. Me good man, me save you, me save ship, you get money, beat Li Han, very good, huh?"

He ended his long speech with a beaming smile of angelic innocence and good-will.

"All Chinamen are liars," said the captain half to himself. "You have to take what they say by contraries; I suspect that typhoon was what blew me luck. Listen, Sam: How much money did Li Han promise you?"

"Li Han big liar," evaded Sam Thom. "Him promise money, him maybe no pay. Li Han have big sleeve, many wise things up sleeve. Maybe him get the eight thousand dollars different way, then no pay me. See? So I think—help you. You pay me anyway, maybe one thousand, two thousand dollars, huh?"

"I'll pay you nothing," said the captain with decision.

"Me think you pay," said Sam Thom unperturbed. "You no pay, maybe crew mutiny, throw you in ocean, huh?"

"Well, Sam, there's the forecastle," pointed the captain sternly. "Get down there now and start your mutiny. Get on, I say."

"No, no," weakened Sam with waving gesture. "No can do. You good man, me like you. You no pay, me say all same all right. Savvy?"

"Sam," said the captain. "The more you talk, the less I know. Get off the bridge and let me think."

"All right," agreed the ship-chandler amiably. "Maybe after while you think pay me." He made his cautious way down to the forward deck. The captain took to pacing back and forth across the narrow bridge, his head bowed in puzzled thought.

A shadow darkened his path. He looked up to see Ching—Ching, dirty and greasy as always, his chin still scabbed from the nick of the captain's fist.

"What's here?" asked Christianson angrily. "What do you want of me?"

The engineer looked square in his captain's face, his somber eyes friendly and unashamed.

"I want t' tell ye the truth," he said simply.

The captain eyed him curiously.

"The truth?" he mused. "I'd like to know it. Speak on, I'm listening."

"First send f'r Davis," asked Ching.

The Captain considered.

"We'll go below for that," he decided. "I'll have Pike take the bridge."

Ten minutes later, sternward on the boat deck, they met to hear what Ching had to tell. To the left of the captain stood the big, red-haired engineer, to his right Davis, with two seamen clutching him firmly, each by an arm.

Disheveled and dirty was the Britisher, barefooted and in shirtsleeves. He seemed downcast and dejected, and he looked sick, shaking almost incessantly as with a chill.

"Capt'n," began Ching in the manner of one having much to tell. "Y' been good t' me. Y' may be thinkin' I turned ag'in y', but listen an' ye'll understand."

The Eurasian paused briefly, his chest rising and falling with unusual emotion, his hands working nervously.

"M' father died when I was a kid," he went on. "M' mother was Chinese; she had hard times gettin' enough to feed us both. Ten years ago, when I was sixteen she got work in a cotton mill at Wu Hu. 'Twas th' best work she'd ever had—thirty cents big money f'r a fourteen hour day. I got work too, helpin' the engineer in th' same mill. We was fairly rich."

At the mention of Wu Hu, Davis had looked up questioningly; but after a moment his head dropped again in listless dejection.

"One day th' white man in th' mill got mad at my mother," went on the engineer. "She had done some damage to th' loom. He cursed her an' shook his fist. She threw out her hand t' defend herself, an' he hit her on th' temple with his fist. In five minutes she was dead. The —— who killed her was an Englishman named Davis."

The engines of the *Hshee Chong* pounded on with their uneven chug; the breeze blew soft across the deck; a gull swooped alongside. The little group on the boat deck were tense and motionless. Davis dropped his head with no sign that he had so much as heard Ching's words; only his face was flushed as with fever, and his body shook with perpetual chill.

The two sailors stood holding him as impassive as statues. Opposite those three the engineer clenched his fists and panted with emotion like a spent runner for breath. The face of the captain shone with a great understanding, he held the link that bound together distant years—a lad of sixteen weeping above his dead mother, a well-reported British man of business ruined, disgraced and a prisoner.

"I got my revenge!" screamed out the Eurasian. " 'Twas worth waitin' for. Y'r last penny goes t' th' capt'n here for th' lease o' his ship, an' you're disgraced an' a beggar, bound for —— by way of an English jail."

With a leap of desperate quickness the slender Britisher wrenched himself free from his captors.

"Come with me then!" he shouted and took a great spring across the deck. His hands clutched Ching's throat. The two reeled backward—one step, two, three, four, over the break in the rail where the life-boat had washed away, down, down, down into the muddy swirl of the Yellow Sea.

"Man overboard!" roared the captain and sprang for the rail. He cast out lifebelts and ropes, and the *Hshee Chong* stood by for an hour; but the two men who had gone under the waters they saw no more.

XVII

"THIS is a good voyage to be ending," said Captain Christianson.

"It's the most bloomin' v'y'ge I was ever on," said First Officer Bill Pike with conviction. "When ye first app'inted me deteckative, I told ye so, an' I tell ye so ag'in. They's things about this v'y'ge we'll never understand, Capt'n, not this side o' judgment."

"I understand them better since last night," stated the captain. "Watch, man, a bit more to port!"

With Bill Pike and the captain jointly assisting the second engineer, the *Hshee Chong* had pounded her way toward Shanghai. Now, the voyage successfully made, she was in the river but a few short miles below the docks. She had passed the big liners riding at anchor off the river's mouth, the countless tramp freighters lying off Woosung, the great oil godowns that lifted their tall round towers above the shores of ineffable green.

With Pike at the wheel and the captain standing sociably at his side, she was now picking her way at low speed through countless smaller craft, lighters and barges, motorboats and sampans, laden with the treasures of West and East, met together for commerce in this cross-road of the seas.

"Port it is," complied the mate. "I didn't 'ear of nothin' 'appenin' last night," he hinted inquisitively.

"I went through Ching's papers," said the captain. "He kept a sort of diary—it helped me to understand things."

"I'll read it after we dock," said Pike.

"You will not," declared Christianson. "It went overboard in the night. It would be unfair to publish to defame the dead."

"You mean Davis?" asked Pike; there was disappointment in his tone.

"Ching's course was none too creditable neither," went on the captain thoughtfully. " 'Twas in his blood—half Irish, half Chinese. He had the Irish anger at wrong—and the Chinese habit of plotting behind his enemy's back. His diary ran back for five long years, and every page of it sang of revenge."

" 'E 'ad th' right to revenge," muttered Bill Pike. " 'Is mother 'ad been killed."

"Even a tiger doesn't track its prey for ten years," said Christianson solemnly. "The Word of God says 'Blessed are the merciful.' Ching had no thought of mercy—with every day that passed he dreamed of a more satisfying vengeance."

" 'E got it, too," commented Bill Pike.

"His chance came after Davis had lost his post in the cotton mills," went on the captain ignoring Bill's interruption. "He seems to have had a helper—a servant who had Davis' confidence but who hated him as all the Chinese did and was willing to turn against him. Davis had been rich at one time, but had lost, gambling in silk. He had ten thousand dollars left, he was out of work, and he was looking for a paying speculation."

"A payin' crime," corrected the First Officer.

"Yes," agreed the captain. "Somehow he got in touch with this man Wang and his plans for gun-running. Davis was to furnish a steamer, Wang was to be navigator. There would be good profit. The problem with Davis was to handle the deal in a way to avoid criminal accusation. Once the smuggling was over, he could go back to Shanghai or to England and be respectable."

"I told ye 'e was crooked th' first day out," reminded Bill complacently.

"Then came Ching's chance," kept on Christianson ignoring the detective's boast. "Davis, of course, did not recognize him—probably had forgotten all about him—Ching had grown from boyhood to manhood. He approached Davis with an offer to betray the *Hshee Chong* in return for a share of the profits. They made terms. Davis agreed to lease the ship from me as the first step—of course he never expected that I'd live to collect my money."

"Did Ching agree to have ye killed?" asked the Mate.

"Ching meant me no harm," answered the Captain patiently, "but he was so wrapped up in the thought of vengeance that he could think of naught else. His idea was to implicate Davis in piracy and murder and then betray him in turn to British authorities who would give him the limit of the law.

It was Davis' idea to scuttle the ship when he was through with her, with all on board, and then give out that she had been wrecked. He had no intention of leaving a single trace that could ever implicate him. I suspect he planned to dispose of both Ching and Wang lest they might some day rise up and accuse him."

" 'E was a ——," said Pike with conviction.

"He was serving mammon," quoth the captain. "He was on a desperate enterprise, and he was ready to take desperate steps. And from the time that they seized the ship, Ching was overmatched. He would never have had a chance to betray Davis for piracy. If it hadn't been for Sam Thom and the typhoon, Ching would never have got his revenge."

"Poor Ching," reflected Bill Pike. "I tells ye Capt'n, ye'll 'ave a time afore ye get another engineer like him."

"I thought you always hated Ching," said the captain unsmiling.

" 'E was a good man," contended the First Officer. "A bit wild 'e was, but a good man with the ingynes. Ye'll hunt f'r another as good."

"We'll not need one immediately," said the captain. "We're going to lay up in Shanghai for three months and have the *Hshee Chong* done over, engines rebuilt, fresh paint, new cabins, electricity and an iceplant."

"M' very word," said the mate deeply impressed. "A regylar floatin' palace! D'ye think ye c'n haul more freight with a layout like that?"

"We're through hauling freight," said the captain briefly. "I have something better in mind."

"Capt'n, look a 'ere," said Pike with the sarcasm of curiosity. "Don't ye reckon the *Hshee Chong* is a bit small f'r a ocean liner?"

"Guess again," said the captain good-naturedly.

"Ye ain't a goin' t' turn 'er into no river boat?" asked Bill with alarm.

"Do I look like a fresh-water sailor?" retorted Christianson. "If you're such a wonderful detective, mate, why can't you guess a simple thing like this?"

"Good deteckatives don't do no guessin'," came back the First Officer. They goes by th' evidence. Accordin' to th' evidence, ye're a turnin' th' *Hshee Chong* into a private yacht t' sail 'roun' th' world; but accordin' to th' evidence likewise ye ain't got no millyun dollars to run no private yacht. Anyway, a deteckative ain't supposed t' discover nothin' but crime. Ye ain't a turnin' pirate, are ye?"

"I'll tell you later," said the captain, "after I've worked out my plans—Hello, here comes Sam!"

"Ahoy, Sam!" greeted the captain. "Feeling better?"

"Very good," grinned Sam. "Me save ship, me very happy. Now you pay me reward, huh?"

"Look here, Sam," reasoned the captain. "Haven't we given you this three weeks' trip up and down the China coast. A rare voyage for you has it been; and I'm not going to charge you a cent. What more can you ask?"

"You all same very funny," said the fat ship-chandler. "Me think after while you all same pay reward."

"Well, Sam," said the captain more earnestly, "we've had a good voyage, barring the loss of Ching, and made some money. I'm going to lay up in Shanghai now for a few weeks and refurnish the *Hshee Chong*. There'll be some three thousand dollars worth of cash business for some honest ship-chandler who can make me a fair price."

"My price very low," said Sam Thom with sudden interest. "You give me first chance, I take no reward, give you all best price."

"Li Han will feel sick to see us back," suggested the captain with a sudden change of subject.

"No can tell," said Sam Thom. "Me very 'fraid Li Han. Him all time very wise."

"H-m-m," mused the captain. "What do you mean?"

"Me 'fraid," expatiated the ship-chandler with a most unusual burst of confidence. "Maybe Li Han say '*Hshee Chong* no come back, must get money other way.' Him beat you yet."

"It can't be done," said the captain with conviction. "The contract is too explicit. He can't get the money till the *Hshee Chong* comes back."

"No can tell," persisted Sam Thom. "Li Han him very wise."

"Capt'n," broke in Bill Pike from the wheel, "what d'ye make o' that funnel—over behind that bloomin' British battleship?"

The Captain raised his glasses and took a searching look.

"Can't see her yet," he announced. "Wait till we pass that warship. The funnel looks halfway familiar."

Intently the trio watched while the *Hshee Chong* pulled up foot by foot past the destroyer. As they came abreast, the other steamer swung suddenly into full view. A tiny coasting-boat she was, low-lying in the stream, body once painted black but now dirty past description, her single rusty funnel slanted sternward as if bent back by a typhoon.

"Th' name, Capt'n!" cried the mate. "Read th' name."

"'*Hshee Chong*, Shanghai,'" read the captain slowly through his glasses.

"Well, I'm blowed," ejaculated the First Officer. "Are we both drunk an' see double, 'r have we gone plumb crazy?"

His words brought no response. He turned his head to see why his captain had not replied; the captain was gone; he and Sam Thom were alone upon the bridge.

With recklessness such as he had never shown in all his life, the First Officer let loose the wheel, leaving the ship to run blind through the crowded stream, and rushed to the rail to look for Christianson. He was in time to see the fat Captain, having swung himself over the starboard rail by a rope, drop into a daring sampan and urge its rower to frantic speed for shore.

"Well, blooey!" mused Bill Pike, regaining the wheel in time to keep from going off-course. "Blooey. I may be crazy, but th' capt'n's worse. W'at th' blooey does 'e mean?"

"No can tell," answered Sam Thom.

XVIII

ACROSS the counter of the Hong-Kong-Shanghai Bank the lean and nervous Purvis stood talking to a well-built young man with straight pompadour of heavy yellow hair—the Danish Vice-Consul to the Port of Shanghai.

"I see, I see," Purvis was saying. "But, my dear Mr. Edridson, there is nothing else I can do. I had orders to pay over this money upon the return of the steamer."

"You shall better wait," said the Vice-Consul in rather broken English. "I tell you I have letter from Captain Christianson. He say, you shall wait till he shall come back."

"I see," said Purvis. "But already I have waited three days. The *Hshee Chong* is in port and this Chinaman claims the money. My instructions are to pay. If I delay further, I injure the reputation of the Bank, besides imperiling my own position."

The Vice-Consul scratched his puzzled head.

"This boat may be not the *Hshee Chong*," he suggested. "You are sure?"

"We have identified her," said Purvis somewhat stiffly. "I went to the river myself for that very purpose. What more can you ask?"

Edridson shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not know," he confessed.

"Here comes the man himself," pointed Purvis. "Supposing you talk to him."

Li Han it was who approached the pair at the counter. He was dressed in his long robe of figured gray silk, a black mandarin cap on his head, his hands thrust up his ample sleeves, his face impassive, hard, cold.

"Good morning, Mr. Purvis," he said in his excellent English. "I have come now for my money."

"This is Mr. Edridson," introduced Purvis. "He is here as a friend of Captain Christianson."

"Captain Christianson, where is he?" asked Edridson without formalities.

"He is very sick in Foochow," answered Li Han. "He asked me to draw the money and send his share to him."

"Have you his letter?" asked the Vice-Consul.

"He told the sailor to tell me," said Li Han calmly. "He wrote no letter."

"The *Hshee Chong* is here in port?" pursued Edridson.

"Mr. Purvis have seen her," replied the Oriental. "You shall ask him."

"You see, Mr. Edridson, we are bound to pay," broke in Purvis somewhat irritably. "We have no excuse for further delay. I must do my duty to the Bank."

"I think something wrong," persisted the Vice-Consul, impressed most unfavorably with Li Han's coldness. "Something wrong," he repeated.

"This Li Han is a rich man," said Purvis in a low voice, leading the Dane to one side. "I am sure he is wholly responsible—at least as much so as any Chinaman. If it develops that there is fraud between them as partners, let the Captain sue him and recover. That surely is none of the business of the Bank."

"I wait for my money," spoke up Li Han with icy impatience.

"First you shall sign paper," said the Vice-Consul; Li Han vouchsafed no reply.

Taking his fountain pen the Vice Consul wrote the following:

> I promise that the *Hshee Chong* which I have in the river is the steamer of which Captain Christianson is my partner.

"There," he said. "I can do no further. You shall please sign that before you take the money."

"I see no reason for signing this," said Li Han coldly.

Purvis leaned across the counter and read what the Vice-Consul had written.

"There is no harm in that, Mr. Li," said he assuringly. "I think perhaps, if you sign it, you will save delay. This Mr. Edridson is a gentleman of great influence in Shanghai."

"I will sign," agreed Li Han. "First you will give me my money."

"I have the check ready," answered Purvis—and indeed he held the piece of paper in his hand. "Sign this paper of Mr. Edridson's and this bank receipt, and the check is yours."

Taking pen in hand the aristocratic Chinaman wrote his name in excellent English script upon the Vice-Consul's document. Then, even as he reached over to sign the receipt, there was sudden commotion. A fat, red-faced, bareheaded seaman in uniform of rumpled white tore into the Bank and up to the group at the counter.

"I'm here!" he panted, breathless from running.

"Captain Christianson!" exclaimed the Vice-Consul in Danish. "Then you are not sick?"

"I am ill," said Li Han. "I must go outside."

With the words he started to walk with dignity to the door; but with each step he quickened his retreat; and he went out through the door on a tearing run, the tails of his long silk robe flying ingloriously behind. Into his waiting auto he leaped and was off without one backward look.

"I see," said Purvis, very much puzzled and not seeing at all; in his hand still holding the check. "I see. This is Captain Christianson?"

"And the *Hshee Chong* is in the river," added the Captain. "But Davis is dead."

CLAD in his best shore suit of white, round his neck a shiny white celluloid collar, Bill Pike, First Officer of the *Hshee Chong*, sat comfortably at a small round table in the Shanghai-American Bar on Bubbling Well Road and discussed a bottle of Japanese beer with a fellow crony of the seas.

"Capt'n says 'e's willin' t' pay all 'e owes t' that blame chink," he expatiated, "but the villain has left town. 'E won't come back f'r 'is money, neither, 'cos if 'e does, 'e'll be put in jail."

The other seaman, a big and hairy man, spat disputatiously on the floor and took a huge swallow of beer.

"He didn't do no crime," he asserted. "Paintin' one craft t' look like another ain't no crime. How could they put him in jail?"

"Them are fine p'ints o' law," answered Bill Pike learnedly. "I've been a studyin' 'em up. F'r one thing, 'e 'ad a Danish flag a flyin' on 'is bogus ship. That's agin th' laws of Denmark to govern ships in port. Another thing, 'e tried to get money from a British Bank. Ain't no British Bank'll stand bein' done out o' money—not by no bloomin' chink."

" 'E was all in cahoots with that there Davis, warn't he?" queried the other seaman.

"Not much 'e wasn't," said Pike. " 'E was out t' do th' capt'n an' Davis both. 'E sent Sam Thom along on purpose t' keep either of 'em from a gettin' back t' Shanghai till after 'e'd got th' money, but Sam couldn't do it—'e couldn't bribe th' crew. They thought too much of Capt'n an' me t' turn agin us. So now Sam comes out an' swears 'e went along just t' save th' capt'n's life. Wonderful how them Chinks c'n lie!"

"What's your fat capt'n a goin' to do with th' money?" inquired the strange mariner.

" 'E's a spendin' of it fast," answered Pike, "a doin' over th' *Hshee Chong*. 'E'll have all 'is money spent by th' time 'e's done with 'is floatin' palace."

"W'at's he a thinkin' of?" came the question. " 'E's plumb crazy t' fix up an' ol' coastin' boat like a ocean liner."

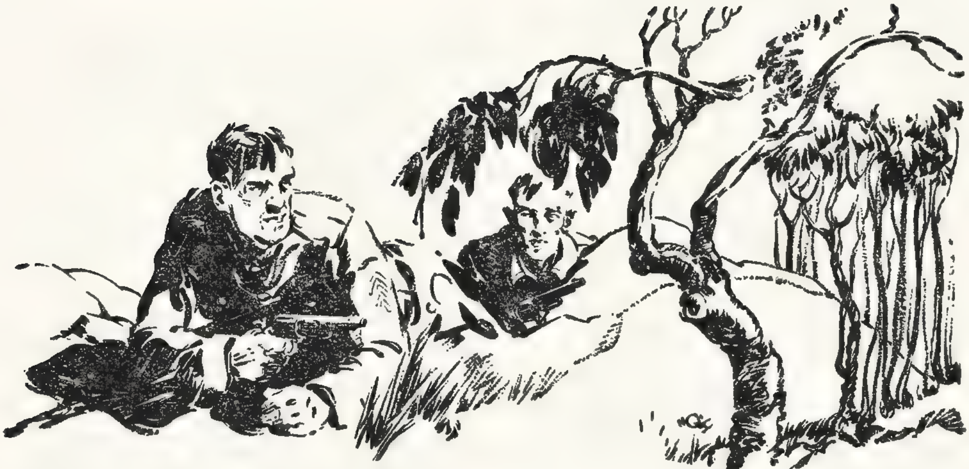
" 'E's a goin' in f'r passenger trade," explained Bill, tipping his chair back against the wall. "Towers f'r travelers who want t' see th' Chiny coast. 'E'll take 'em from Darien clean down t' Malacca an' touch at ev'ry port on th' coast. Three hundred dollars 'e aims t' charge f'r ev'ry pasenger an' 'e says Thomas Cook an' Son'll send him a full cargo on ev'ry v'y'ge."

"You won't like no such blasted passenger boat," predicted Bill's crony with a shake of his hairy head. "All them travelers are crazy as loons."

"Barbershop on board," resumed the First Officer dreamily. "Capt'n says I got t' 'ave a shave ev'ry day. 'E's a buyin' me twenty uniforms with gold lace on th' caps, an' 'e says I got t' change ev'ry day. Steam laundry on board t' wash 'em up."

"You'd better be a huntin' a new berth," advised the strange sailor.

"Oh, I'll stay by the ship," resignedly sighed Bill Pike. "Capt'n is 'elpless without me," he ruminated. "I'll 'ave t' stand by. If it 'adn't a been f'r my deteckative work, 'e'd be drowned by now in the Chiny Sea. I saved the ship."



Hard Lines *A Complete Novelette*

by William Byron Mowery

Author of "Tyro and Tyrant," "The Scout," etc.

"Ma mignonette, embrassez-moi.
Nenni, m'sieur, je n'oserais,
Car si mon papa le savait——"

SERGEANT WHIPPLE, mounted, bit off "Sweet Alouette" suddenly, and reined in his chestnut mare. Leaning over her neck, he peered down at the stubble of buffalo grass. A recent prairie fire had blasted and blackened it to its roots.

Three lengths behind him, Constables Brewhouse and Delong and Indian Agent Block halted their mounts. An extra horse, led by Delong, nipped at a new-sprung clump of purple vetches. An accommodating buffalo-bird hopped up and down the animal's backbone, picking off flies and avoiding the swishing tail. In the horse's light pack reposed eight thousand one-dollar bills—the half-yearly treaty money which the Mounted detail was escorting to the "Stoney" Indians on their reservation.

Westward the sun already had ducked behind the distant Canadian Rockies. June twilight lingered over the broad Alberta plains and foothills. Beside his hole a khaki gopher dug for grass roots. A quarter-mile ahead a coyote yapped in a belt of white-woods bordering a prairie creek.

"That kyoty sounds good," remarked Brewhouse, a leather-faced man of forty, who had been a bull-train driver in Wyoming Territory before joining the Force. "A country is Billy —— without kyoties."

"The sergeant sings like he had some alkali-cutter in his canteen," suggested Delong, a new recruit from the Saskatchewan. "What's he eying? I say, if it's fresh buffler, we eat calf for supper."

"Whip don't drink! And this isn't any buffler hunt we're on now, son," Brewhouse pointed out, then added, with a poker-straight face, "You haven't heard? The sergeant's going to marry; that's why he's singing about his *mignonette*. Don't tell anybody I told you."

Delong's mouth fell agape. He swallowed the spoof like a greased oyster. Brewhouse winked at Block. The Indian agent grinned broadly at the idea of Whipple's getting married.

"Come here, Ed," the sergeant bade, swinging out of his saddle. "Now do you read this trail?"

Brewhouse dismounted and strode up. He stood wide-legged, looking down at the faint signs.

"Three bucks. They're leaving the country right now. Probably young fellows without packs. They come along here about, say, noon."

Whipple nodded.

"Furthermore, I'll bet my turnip against a shirt-button that these tracks were laid down by the three bloods who broke out of the jug at the post last night. Ordinarily a plains buck won't walk. A Stoney will steal a horse but what he rides. A blood will steal horse, bridle and saddle if he's got time and the chance."

"I wouldn't call your bet, Sergeant," Brewhouse agreed. "That's the three bloods, all right. They're *hyaking* it for the border."

"Maybe they are; maybe they're not. They were in mischief in the States before we caught them, so they oughtn't to be going back again."

Whipple swung into his saddle and clucked to his horse.

"I'm going to follow them a couple miles to make sure which way they're headed. You stay here till I get back. Then we'll cross the creek and camp for the night. Keep an eye out while I'm gone."

He rode off at a swift trot, his eyes on the file of moccasin tracks.

They led straight south, swerving not a bit for hill or bog. Three miles below, the prairie creek bent east. Whipple found a safe ford, crossed, and picked up the tracks beyond on the unburnt prairie. After making sure they were headed for the border, he turned back.

Dusk fell. When the sergeant was a rifle shot from where he left the escort, his mare whinnied. The other mounts did not answer. Whipple looked ahead in the shadows, failing to see his constables. He reached the spot and found them gone.

"——'s bells!" he rasped to the mare. "Can't they follow orders once for a change? I'll lay Brewhouse out straight! He's old enough to know better."

With a free rein, the mare tracked the other horses at a lope. They headed toward the creek. Whipple looked for the camp-fire to guide him in, surmising that the constables had decided to cross and let their animals graze on the unburned meadow before dew fell.

AS HIS horse slowed to a walk and entered the belt of lodge-pole timber, she suddenly shied and barked Whipple's leg against a sapling. Dismounting, his Snider unslung from the saddle bucket, he stepped forward cautiously.

"Sud—gnt!"

The muffled sound from a clump of alder made him jump.

"Ss-ud-g-nt! H-uu-re!"

Whipple nervily thrust into the dark thicket, guided by a thrashing of bushes. He struck a match.

"Good lord!"

Brewhouse, hog-tied hands and feet, was trying to work his gag loose. Block had half-risen against a tree. Delong lay face downward, his head turned barely enough to let him breathe. As the sergeant's match flickered out, his eyes caught a glimpse of a feathered arrow protruding from Delong's shoulder.

Dropping carbine, Whipple cut the *babische* thongs from Brewhouse and Block and helped them to their feet. In a general way he realized what had happened. He wasted no time.

"Block, finish slapping yourself, and build a fire for light. Brewhouse, get my canteen. Delong's badly hurt."

He slashed the constable's thongs, took away the gag and eased him against a knee. Delong was barely conscious. His tunic was sodden. The cold water on his face revived him somewhat.

"Indians?" Whipple asked Brewhouse, while Block coaxed a flame.

"Nine of 'em. South Piegans, from across the border. No mistake. They laid in here closer'n weazels and bounced us all at once when we split to pass the thicket. Shot Bill when he tried to grab his carbine out of the sling."

"They took the horses, too?"

"Yes. They only had seven that I saw."

The twig fire brightened. Whipple unbuttoned Delong's coat and examined the arrow wound quickly. Shot at close distance by a powerful ram's-horn bow, the fluted dogwood had pierced clear through the constable's right shoulder just beneath the collar bone, and stood out on either side. It was a painful, ugly wound. The slightest movement of arm or trunk was excruciating.

"You rest him, Ed," Whipple bade. "Easy there. Now, old man—" he spoke lightly to Delong—"we're going to snake that thing out of your general make-up. You don't need it a-tall in there. Whistle 'Annie Laurie' or cuss. What d'you say? It's got to be done."

"Go ahead, Sergeant," Delong said gamely, tensing himself.

Whipple cut off the feathered butt, took firm hold of the barb and its lashing, and with a single steady pull drew the shaft on through. A mere trickle of blood came out. He looked up and met Brewhouse's thankful glance. Both men had expected a surge of blood that might quickly be mortal.

"There's just one thing to do," Whipple said crisply. "That's to get back to the post right now. It's a deal nearer than the Stoney reservation. We can't follow the Piegans. Even if we could, Bill's safety comes first. Ed, you unsaddle the mare, take her to the creek, water her good and rub her down.

"She'll have to carry double going back, for Bill can't sit on alone. And we'll make better time if we eat a bite ourselves. I'd give a leg to have a pint of good 'permit' for Bill. Block, get out what grub is in my saddle flaps. I'll attend to Bill."

IN THE prairie night, Whipple and Brewhouse were walking ahead of the horse. Block, lighter than either of them, was riding most of the time, holding a figure that swayed almost helplessly. The sergeant set a swift pace.

"Ain't this Billy —— proper?" Brewhouse broke a half hour's silence.

No answer. The mare's hoofs *cr-crumped cr-crumped* monotonously on the thick sod.

"It sure is!" the constable answered his own question. "And right now I'm saying who's to blame for it, Sergeant. If we'd stayed out there in the open as you ordered, it might not have happened. But I opined we could cross the creek and have a snack ready by the time you got back. If they's any blame, I'm going to shoulder it."

"Forget it," Whipple said tersely. "You had no business going against orders, and I had no business leaving my detail and seeing where those bloods went to. But you had good reasons and so did I. It's just hard lines, that's all. We'll be three crows on a rail, when it comes to taking the blame."

"That's just the point," Brewhouse objected. "We won't be three crows. Remittance will single you out and load all the blame on your shoulders. You know that as well as I do, Sergeant."

"Remittance" was the barracks name for Inspector Raymond, commanding officer at the post. The men had found out that he got money from home regularly. His brief term as commander had endeared him to neither his non-coms nor constables. Nobody ever privately "cussed him out," as a good superior officer should be occasionally. He did nor elicit that much respect. Just as far as possible, he was ignored.

"Maybe he will," Whipple answered. "If he feels that way, let him."

"But see here, Sergeant" Brewhouse argued, "you're in the frying-pan now. You come in drunk two evenings ago. So Remittance says. You let the three bloods escape last night. So Remittance and his reports say. If you get blamed for this mess we're in, it'll just naturally bust you, or worse. When a fellow gets on the slide in this outfit, he goes down so fast and far it makes him sea-sick."

Whipple did not comment. Presently he spelled Block in the saddle for a couple of miles. Brewhouse refused his turn.

"It's some more of my business," the constable broke silence again, "but why has Remittance been riding you ever since he came on the job, Sergeant?"

"I didn't know he was riding me."

Brewhouse snorted.

"You're not quite so mole-eyed as all that. Everybody's seen it. He's been riding you for six months. That's why I wanted to take the blame for this fix we're in. Remittance can't hurt my chances for promotion, because I ain't got any. But you, man, you've got a commission due some of these serene days. If Remittance gets in his report, your chances won't be worth a *bodewash* chip."

"If you can't talk about anything but Remittance riding me, don't talk!" Whipple snapped. "It's raw enough anyway. I can stand just so much."

"No harm meant, Sergeant. I thought it might help to know the bunch is with you."

"No harm taken, Ed," Whipple replied heartily. "But let's forget it. Bill's standing the trip nicer than I thought he would. We'll be back at the Post by one o'clock."

They tramped steadily on, silent. In half an hour they came to a slight wagon road worn by the Red River carts of freight haulers and stray settlers. In another hour, from a swell, they saw the distant light of the guard room.

"When we get in to the post, Ed," Whipple directed, "you rouse Sergeant Bode and have him attend to Bill's shoulder. Then Bode had better take him on in to

Badger settlement and let Doctor Blanton care for him. I'll report to the Inspector. You get something to eat, for two pursuit parties will probably go out right away and you'll have to guide one."

They reached the post.

The sergeant walked across the small quadrangle of buildings and knocked on the door of Raymond's cabin.

"Sergeant Whipple, sir," he announced, answering the question within. "I have a report to make."

"This is a peculiar time to make reports, I must say," the voice snapped. "I sent you on the treaty money detail. What are you doing back here?"

"That's my report, sir."

The Inspector lighted a candle and dressed fully before admitting his top non-com. He was a slight-built, natty officer lacking two years of Whipple's thirty and several inches of Whipple's height.

In straight-forward fashion the sergeant told his story. The inspector's eyes narrowed as he listened. Still he did not, for some strange reason, seem altogether displeased at what he heard.

"If I can have a sufficient detail with extra mounts, sir, there is a chance to recover the treaty money before the Piegans reach the border," Whipple added briefly. "I know this lower country pretty well, and I can catch them, I'm sure. But the pursuit detail ought to start at once. It will take hard riding to head them off before they get over the border. If they once do cross, we can't follow; and before we could negotiate with the United States cavalry officers through the regular channels, the Piegans could dispose of the money and perhaps cover up evidence."

"You have a detail?" Raymond echoed with open scorn. "You? That's rather a bit—ah, presumptuous, Sergeant Whipple. You've bungled sufficiently already. My patience with you is exhausted. If you have performed a single duty satisfactorily in the last six months, I'm not aware of it. Besides this, there are three distinct overt charges against you. Two evenings ago you came back from the settlement boisterous and drunk——"

"I came back singing, sir. I was not drunk," Whipple contradicted.

"You came back drunk," Raymond repeated. "As punishment you were assigned to guard prisoners for the night. Through your neglect of duty the three bloods escaped."

"It was not my fault, sir," Whipple interrupted, respectfully. "I asked, sir, that the lunatic Doukhobor be taken out of the strong cell and the bloods put in there where they could not have escaped."

Raymond stamped his foot.

"I'm speaking, Sergeant Whipple! Don't interrupt. Those two offenses are bad enough to demote you, if not more. But now, intrusted with a large sum of money, you ride off on some fool's errand and leave your detail standing in the middle of the prairie. You are flatly responsible."

"I'll shoulder the responsibility," Whipple said quietly. "But there isn't any time to waste. If a pursuit detail does not get off before morning, there is no use to send one. An hour or two at the most is all the margin we've got."

"You are doubly responsible for this loss," Raymond went on, his concise voice raised. "How did those Piegans know about the escort? They could have learned of it only from the bloods, who heard of the treaty money while here and whom you permitted to escape, in your drunken——"

The sergeant's face whitened. His eyes looked squarely into Raymond's. They were dangerously alight—the only indication of Whipple's struggle to keep cool.

"Pardon me, Inspector, but——"

Raymond took no warning. He was new to the post, new to the caliber of the men under him. Whipple was a westerner with easy notions about rank, for all his six years of service. He had showed no outward signs, but the several months of nagging had rankled. Escape of the prisoners, loss of the treaty money, the ignominious tramp back to the post, climaxed six months of hard lines and damnable bad luck. The lie made him see red.

"Pardon you but what?" Raymond parroted. "You were drunk and so you are book——"

"That's a lie, Inspector. Don't say it again!"

Raymond stepped back aghast. His hand sought his belt where his Enfield revolver should have been. He backed to the table and reached for his walking-out sword.

"You are under arrest, Sergeant Whipple," he spluttered, when he had a weapon in his hand and had recovered from the stupefaction of having the lie slapped in his face. "You will be confined until my reports are acted upon."

Whipple's eyes flashed. He kept his head with a visible struggle.

"Maybe!" he retorted, with the snap of a sudden decision. "We'll see about that later. If you won't act, I will."

He whirled on his heel and banged the door behind him.

Eight or nine constables and non-coms had tumbled out of their trestle beds and were listening to Brewhouse's third telling of the ambuscade. As they listened, they were hastily getting ready to go out on detail.

Whipple came into the barracks. The hubbub stopped. The men looked up at him; looked at each other casually. Their sergeant strode past to his bunk and started throwing a thing or two together.

"Ed," he spoke to Brewhouse, "go out and wrangle the black gelding, my own horse, please."

"What's the idea of just one horse, sergeant? Who's going with you on pursuit?"

Whipple turned to face the men squarely.

"I haven't heard of any pursuit. It'll get away some time tomorrow. Remittance is too busy putting down my offenses just now, so I'll get all that's coming to me. I'm riding off alone."

The faces in the candle shadows went blank and incredulous.

"Riding off alone?" Corporal Slimp ejaculated. "I say, Whip, that joke isn't funny."

"So it isn't!" Whipple answered. "Neither's the prospect of those Piegans putting a trick like this over on us and getting away with it while we suck our thumbs. I can't take a detail without the inspector's orders. So I'm riding off alone. Ed, are you going to wrangle that horse?"

"Don't you do it, Ed!" called out three or four.

The whole half-dressed detachment grouped about Whipple. By now they they realized that no pursuit detail was going immediately, and that Whipple had starkly decided to take things into his own hands. Individually they swore at him, pleaded and shook their fists under his nose.

"I lost the money and it's up to me to get it back," Whipple argued stubbornly. "I'd rather ride off alone than cool my heels in the jug like a cow-stealing Crow. If I have luck, it will make up for some of the charges against me, maybe."

"I don't care if you and Remittance did have a set-to and he loaded all the blame on you," Slimp cried. "I don't care what his —— reports say. When Superintendent Van Haile comes around, here's nine men that'll say different. We're fist and mitten with you, old man. Don't ride off alone without orders, Whip. You don't know what'll bust if you do. You can't take them Piegans by yourself."

"I don't expect to follow them. But I've got a notion I can turn the trick against them just the same. I'm going across the border. It's about the only chance, since Remittance won't act. Get the strong cell ready, bunch; if I don't bring back the Piegans, I may light there."

Saddle and bridle on his arm, Sergeant Whipple shoved past the men who tried to restrain him and went out the door.

SUNRISE found Whipple twenty miles from the post and fifty from the border. Sundown found him within a two hours' ride of the line. At a limpid little branch springing from some gravel hills he watered the gelding, rubbed him down and pastured him for a couple of hours. Under a bright moon he rode on four miles and camped for the night. In an hour he could cross into the States.

Stretched out on his blanket, hands under his head, Whipple lay awake watching the stars. He had no regrets. He had taken a decisive step in anger, but deliberate anger. Though he had ridden off without orders, he was at least free to carry out his own plans unhampered. The fiddler could be paid afterwards.

The certainty of demotement did not worry Whipple. The end of his term was near; for strong reasons he had decided to quit then. His abilities were far above the average of the enlisted force. In a way he himself knew they were. He felt he had come to a standstill in the service. When the last change of inspectors was made at the post, he had expected a commission and command there. Others had expected it. He knew the whole district minutely.

Resourceful, firm, but respected and liked, he was exactly the man to watch after the Indians, curb the "permit" trade, and protect the hardy settlers who were just filtering into the prairie country. Superintendent Van Haile had pledged his strongest recommendation. But instead, came Remittance, an overgrown cadet and conceited ass. His unjustified nagging, coupled with the hard lines into which Whipple had fallen, had made the sergeant decide to quit and find a field where he could forge ahead.

From his brother's Circle X ranch in Montana he could "pitch off," as the Indians say, into some vocation or other, and get established. He felt the tug of it; there was an imperative, quick need of it.

At earliest dawn he was in the saddle again, riding down a dry valley with steep slopes on each side. It was a pass for the dwindling buffalo herds drifting north and south. A broad central path was worn a foot deep and trodden flint-hard. Narrow paths paralleled it; others led up the draws and died out.

A couple of miles from the narrows of the pass, Whipple heard a rumbling sound. He stopped to listen. The rumbling swelled quickly. A band of buffalo, three or four hundred, crashed out of the larches and down at him. The cow leading the flight set a mad clip.

He quirted his horse out of their path, and peered into the dust cloud. Nothing pursued them. They swept past. The rumbling died away north.

In the sharpened silence he now heard a popping south toward the narrows, where the valley was not much better than a gorge, and where its rim of cliff was unscalable. Rifle shooting unmistakably. It sounded like a battle, shots answering shots.

He cantered half a mile closer, and swung up a scrambly hill. From the eminence he located the fight. One party held the pass. Another, in a drogue of timber, wanted to get through. The second party was large. With his glass Whipple spotted eight or ten horses tied to a couloir. The other party numbered two. He counted shots, noted positions.

"Pair of buffalo hunters flushed some Indians!" he concluded deliberately. "Somebody's going to be less today! If it wasn't white men against Indians, Buck, we'd pass it up. We're in a hurry, but——"

WITH a last glance to get his bearings right, he edged off the hill, struck west, then south at full gallop. He hit the valley below the narrows. Picketing the horse, he started up cautiously. The beleaguered whites were just ahead, in a thicket of second growth.

Whipple crouched down and cupped his hands.

"Ho yo, partners!" he hailed softly.

"Who the ——?" whipped back.

"Friend."

"Then for ——'s sake, friend, ease up here on the double *pront.*"

Whipple hurried forward and crept into the thicket. A prone figure in the togs of a U. S. Army corporal slewed around and looked up at him.

Whipple nearly dropped his rifle.

"Pat Copp!"

"My eyes an' stars! Hand me a—flop down—a paw, Whipple. Never was gladder to see you in my born days!"

A bullet breast-high clipped off a twig neatly.

Whipple ran a thumb along his cartridge belt, business-like.

"Where's your partner, Pat?"

Copp chuckled.

"I took you in too, huh? I'm by my sweetly lonesome. Been hopping like a rabbit between two places to make the varmints believe they's two of me. That held 'em off so far."

"How many? What breed?"

"Can't exactly say. Eight or ten. Piegans, I take 'em, off one of our reservations."

Whipple's ears pricked up.

"You chased them up from the south? After them?"

"—— no! They're after me. We met head-on. An hour ago I started across the open place. *Pop-bang-zimm!* That's my hoss there, the brown thing, poor ——. They got him first pot. I yelped to my partner as wasn't behind me, an' high-tailed it into these sticks with pea-balls splashing round the buffler dust. What's the matter?"

"Did you see any of the bucks—recognize them?" Whipple asked quickly.

"Seen nothing but bullets an' they come too fast to be seen. But we'll have a good honest eyeful of the varmints in a wink or two. They're getting restless. —— an' high water won't stop 'em from coming on through this pass. They're south bound, that bunch is, an' they want the tracks."

"Why didn't they go around?"

"You tell me an' I'll answer your question. One sure thing, they're powerf'ly in a hurry. They must have been up to something an' been afraid to get out of this valley on the open range on each side. Must want to erase me because they think I'm pursuing 'em."

"I'm guessing that particular bunch have been in mischief," Whipple surmised. "They must have swung away east to shake off pursuit. Of course, with all these bands crossing the border back and forth——"

Copp looked at him quizzically.

"Are you talking to yourself?"

Briefly Whipple told him about the Piegan ambuscade and loss of the treaty money.

"I see. But *hascum* you're following that ugly outfit yourself?"

"I wasn't following them. I just heard the fighting, got curious, and here I am."

Copp's eyebrows met in a puzzled frown.

"This affair's almighty kinky. If you wasn't following 'em, what are you doing clear down here?"

"What are you doing clear up here?" Whipple parried.

"I was high-tailing up to your cussed post for help on a case before the scent got cold."

Whipple took his eyes off the enemy covert ahead and looked at Copp.

"Well, I'll be blessed! I was on my way to see Captain Allerdyce!"

"I'll be—well, I'll be—be——"

Copp failed to find a tall enough word.

"So will I!"

Neither man asked for particulars. Another business just then was more pressing.

A bullet zipped into the trees, shivering close.

"You give 'em a couple, Whip. Your Snider's got a different bark from my Winch'ster. That'll be more convincing than my hopping."

The two shots drew a hot fire. The whites hugged mother earth till the spurt died.

"If that bunch isn't the bunch, just what is this fight about anyway?" Copp queried.

"I'll bet money they're the bunch I want to get even with for puncturing Billy Delong with that hunting arrow.* Even if they're not, they started the fight with you, didn't they? Besides, they've got no business across the line; they're always up to devilment when they cross.

"These South Piegans make a practise of raiding up here in small bands, then escaping over the border to safety. You've got six times as many troopers down there as we've got. Why don't you keep your rascals at home?"

"Why don't *you?*" Copp retorted. "I'm in trouble with Capt'n Allerdyce. Want to know why? Three of your infernal northern bloods murdered a sutler, cleaned out his cash an' ran off ten fine mounts. Out of our troop corral, by ——. I got the trail job. They jumped back across the border to their own dung-hill an' I was up the stump. The colonel blamed the major, the major blamed Allerdyce, an' Allerdyce jumped on me. There you are."

Whipple smiled.

"Those bloods ran off four blacks, five chestnuts and a pinto, didn't they? White-Leaf, Beaver-Dung and Fire-Went-Out, Copp?"

Copp's jaw fell open. Whipple cut in ahead of him.

"How do I know? See here. Constable Brewhouse and I on patrol rode down their camp two weeks ago. When they couldn't say where they got the horses, we snaked 'em into the post and jugged 'em. That's how we do things up here. But these Piegans, now, would be safe in spending this treaty money at your fort store and treating your colonel to a drink!"

"Oh, hobble your jaw," Copp growled in defense of the service he liked to grumble about. "You Johnny Canucks——"

Whipple was not listening. He eased his carbine forward and pressed it against his shoulder. Copp looked where the barrel pointed.

On the east side of the valley, a narrow, deep-worn buffalo path led out of their covert, paralleling the main path across the open to the next thicket. Midway in the path, Whipple had spotted a thin wisp of dust-smoke rise up, like a punk-ball bursting. A moment later, another, a few feet closer. The white men tensed, watching.

Presently, through a screen of wire-grass, they saw a slight brown bump heave up an inch or two. Whipple's finger crooked. He waited a few seconds. The bump rose another inch. He shot.

The bullet kicked up dust which the light breeze whipped away. No sign, motion. The bump had disappeared.

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*A hunting arrow in general could be distinguished from a war arrow in two ways: The former had flutes or creases in the shaft to let blood drain when the animal was struck, and its tip was lashed firmly on. The war arrow usually had a solid shaft and a tip so loosely tied on that it would pull off the shaft and remain in the wound. This last was always the case when the tip was poisoned, as it often was with a partly decayed mixture of pounded ants and animal spleen.

"Good shot!" Copp whispered. "You just nicked the edge of the dirt an' hit the bump low. But a varmint 'ud kick, wouldn't he?"

Several minutes later they saw another wisp of dust, a yard or two closer. The bump raised again. Whipple held his finger.

"Something's up, Pat. They're not that clumsy."

Copp nodded.

"You back out, Pat, and slip up to where you can see straight down that run. I'll cover the open."

Whipple's tone had a quiet authority behind it; he seemed to take the lead naturally. Copp instinctively fell under his orders. Backing out feet first, he disappeared in the covert to the right. Whipple waited for a shot. None came. In twenty minutes, Copp slid back beside him, swearing luridly.

"See that little jog there? Turns sharper than you'd think. Couldn't look past it. But they's a rock hump out there sixty yards an' the path's shallow. They can't get over that hump without us spotting 'em."

"All right. They're coming up that path. We'll let 'em come. Watch sharp."

The minutes lengthened. Not for a second did the men take their eyes off the narrow track. The Piegans were probably inching as close as they could for a dash. Whipple watched through his service glass. Copp got nervous, aching for something to happen.

From time to time dust-puffs rose, always a few feet closer. They neared the rock dump. Whipple cocked his carbine, pressing the trigger to muffle the click.

The ninth buck, who had worked the dust-puff ruse by coming up the path on the opposite side from the eight others, now had slipped into the thicket and crept upon the whites from behind.

Then something happened, happened in a split-wink, unexpected, shattering the valley's silence and sunny peace. On the west side of the valley, from the narrow path like the one on the east, eight Piegans popped up like gophers out of holes. They yelled; leaped for the thicket. It was but five jumps away.

Whipple flung his carbine smartly around. It caught on a creeper and went off. He jerked it loose and pumped in a cartridge in time to spike the last Piegan. The Indian spread-eagled on his back. Before Copp could muscle forward and get in a shot past Whipple, the others were in cover.

The ruse, old as battle itself, had worked. True to form, the Indians in a pinch had cast aside firearms and reverted to the primitive hand-to-hand fighting.

Under his breath Copp was swearing trooper oaths. Whipple paled. Silence fell over the thicket again. On the left where the Indians were, a brown woods-wren started its "snake" cry.

Tee-tweek-eek-eek. Tee-tweek-eek-eek.

"Copp! They're stalking us here. We've got to surprize them. Got to move. We'll worm up and meet them. Leave your Winchester. Leave it, I say. A rifle's no good in this brush. It's revolvers."

Copp was a plainsman. Brush fighting was new; the thicket a trap.

"Let's back off. Bust for the open. A rock——"

"They'd surround us from cover," Whipple snapped. "Come on!"

Copp squirmed after him. They crawled ten yards, stopped, heads raised from the ground. Five, repeated. Three. Whipple wanted to reach the edge of the wide center path. From there they could catch the Piegans crossing uncovered.

But the *tee-tweek-eek-eek* was too close. It had crossed the path.

Whipple gestured with a hand behind. Copp squirmed up beside him. One pushed his Enfield revolver in front of his nose; the the other his eight-inch Colt.

They were lying in a dense little clump of knee-high nettles. Overhead was a mat of monkey-ladders. Two feet in front, a branchy sapling had fallen. Its leafless twigs screened them; but they could peer through at the thicket beyond. Against a frontal attack their defense was the best possible.

The *tee-tweek-eek-eek* came closer, from tree to tree.

For no reason at all, Whipple thought of a brown warbler nesting in a molasses can which he had nailed up for it under the barrack eaves at the post.

Out of the corner of his eye he glanced at his partner. Copp had quit swearing; he was cool, and tensed like a panther on a limb.

The *tee-tweek-eek-eek* flew off to another part of the little woods, and changed to the *ppt-ppt* of hunting leaf insects and moth eggs.

Twelve feet in front in the thick undergrowth was a small log. It looked hardly big enough to hide a chipmonk. But over it a leafy twig twitched spasmodically, as if a squirrel were shaking it. A pair of lynx-like eyes peered through the foliage. Whipple had spotted the quaking twig; he caught the sparkle of the eyes. Slowly, with infinite patience and caution, his Enfield came up. Even so, the movement was seen by another Piegan. A gun flashed.

An inch above Whipple's head and a handbreath in front, a limb was shattered. Bark flew into his forehead. The bullet glanced up instead of down. Copp's revolver cracked beside Whipple's ear. He felt as if he had been hit over the head by a war club. He fired point-blank at the lynx-eyes. The brush thrashed a moment, then quieted. The Piegan's head lay in the open, in a bed of devil's-club; arms in front of him. In a moment head and arms disappeared, dragged back.

Then dead silence. Silence that was worse than being shot at.

"I missed," Copp whispered, his taut lips scarcely moving. "You got yours a-plenty. Why didn't they rush us?"

"Watch left and back!" Whipple ordered. "They're going to circle us. That's why!"

"It's our —— if they do. I've got open ground on my left an' it's higher behind us. We've got to force a showdown. Let's up an' for 'em."

Whipple caught his shoulder.

"Lay still. They'd pot you in three steps. We wouldn't have the chance we got now."

"I'm no infernal snake!" Copp growled; but he lay still as ordered. "What's that, what's that?"

A low thunder came from the north. Whipple looked up at the sky. Not a cloud in sight. He laid an ear to the ground.

"Buffalo!" he whispered quickly. "Coming back faster than they went! We're a born lucky pair, Patton Copp, if they hurry!"

The rumbling began to shake the ground. It swelled, became a sharper pattering, neared. In an incredibly short minute the herd was in the pass, charging down on the thicket. Wind whipped and sifted a cloud of dust through the trees. It was blinding, choking.

Whipple rose to his knee. He had to shout as the stampede broke upon them.

"Our chance to get out of this fix! Now!"

They crashed through the drogue. Black shaggy brutes shaved by them, bolting madly through the timber. The stampede tore past, enveloped in its dust. The thicket began to clear. Whipple and Copp found cover again. Each slipped a fresh cartridge into his gun.

"Can't expect that to happen ag'in," Copp muttered. "This is the show-down. I could kiss that buffler cow, though."

The Piegans guessed the trick quickly enough and came on, ferreting out the thicket.

One of them, whose face was wider than the sapling he reared behind, ducked down at sight of the white men. He yelled warning. Copp shot low, at the butt of the tree. The yell ended in a gurgling grunt.

Five bucks, knotted together for a rush, popped out of the undergrowth and leaped for the whites thirty feet away. Whipple dropped the leader clean, at the first jump. He ducked under the smoke to get a second shot. Copp emptied half his cylinder. Another went down in the nettles. A third tottered, flung out his arms, regained his balance and crashed off to one side.

The lone buck who had worked the ruse had slipped up from behind. His shot and miss were not noticed, but his clubbed rifle cracked Copp over the head, a glancing, vicious blow. Copp grunted; his head dropped. Whipple had caught the shadow. The rifle-butt cracked down the second time, but Whipple's head did not stop it. Arm crooked upward under his chin, he bored the Piegan twice. The other two fell upon him as he jumped up.

He knocked one staggering with a short down swing of the Enfield. The other drove in a healthy slash with a knife. It cut the buckskin jacket like paper and laid open a six-inch gash down Whipple's left ribs. Whipple grabbed the Piegan's knife arm with both his, and wrenched the blade loose. They locked in a wrestle. The second Indian came at him again. Copp, swaying on one knee, lunged forward and wrapped his arms about the Piegan's legs. They flopped together on the ground, striking blindly, both of them groggy.

Whipple's Piegan was a hard nut. He was a bigger man, quicker; lithe and slippery as a blue-racer. He kept his feet under him and tried to break away. Whipple fastened to him. They wrestled into a clump of briars. The Piegan got a throttle-hold. Whipple gave him a one-two plexus that made him grunt and loosen his clutch. They tripped in the briars and fell down together.

The Indian, quicker, was on top, with a double-handed throttle-hold. Whipple got a deep half-Nelson and used it. They panted, each straining his hold. Whipple steeled his arm and screwed his vise-hold tight till he heard bone sounds. The Piegan went limp; blood gushed from his nose and mouth; his hold broke. Whipple rolled him over and got up.

Copp was sitting on his Indian. His head rocked from side to side on his shoulders. The Piegan was dead.

THE sergeant walked over and laid a hand on the American's shoulder.

"Hurt, buddy?"

"Head feels bigus—Rock—Gibraltar. Thassall."

With an effort he looked up.

"Lord, Whip, that your blood? You're bad hurt. Lemme see."

"I looked. Nothing to write home about. The blade just skidded down over my ribs."

Copp got up unsteadily, leaning one hand against a larch. A twisted grin came over his face.

"That wasn't a half-bad set-to we had, Whip. Never had quarter as purty a tussle in ten years of trooping. Didn't we put them Piegans through the wringer, huh? Is that one dead that you wrestled into the briars?"

"I don't know. Don't think so. I hope not. He can look after these others; and can take their ponies back to their relatives. Sure we'll let him loose. What do we want with prisoners? We'll have enough to do to get ourselves and the money to the post. Anyway, after this lesson, he'll go back to the reservation and put out a potato patch. Get your gun and watch him. I'm going after my horse. Then we'll find out what's hitched up that couloir."

Whipple got his Snider and walked back to the gelding. The black snorted and pranced at smell of the blood, but allowed him to mount. A twitch like a package of needles shot in all directions over his ribs. He had trouble finding the off stirrup with his foot.

By virtue of emptying a canteen over his head, Copp was "around" again. Also, he had the Piegan sitting up, hands tied behind him; and was swearing a blue hornpipe at him in particular and all varmints in general.

Whipple laughed. A twitch caught him in the side and he gasped.

"Now what—me?" Copp rasped. "You ain't got no trip-hammer inside your cussed timber-top, or you wouldn't laugh."

"Sorry, Pat. Couldn't help it. My lord, that port side of yours! It's puffed up like a horny toad on an ant-hill. Man, you're lop-sided!"

"Go to ——!" Copp snarled.

He prodded the Piegan with his Winchester and ordered him up the valley.

Nine horses were tethered in the couloir. Whipple looked them over. Seven of them were Indian mounts; grass-fed animals with no gloss in their coats; hard-ridden; ill-cared-for. The other two were police horses.

"Block's horse and Delong's." Whipple pointed them out. "But where's Brewhouse's gray? Where's Jack-Rabbit, the pack horse?"

Copp passed the query on to the Indian, with a prod in the ribs.

"Where are they, Hairless Dog?" he demanded in forceful Piegan.

"Hairless Dog last saw them tied here, *keechee sagitaw.*"

Copp interpreted.

"I'd think he's lying, Whip, but mind that buck I winged? I looked for him in the brush, an' didn't find him. He pitched off somewhere, when he saw his gang was getting a dressing-down. He lit out with the best hoss an' the money, Whip!"

"Unloosen that bird, Copp," Whipple ordered. "You mount that chestnut of Block's. Tell that specimen to grab a pony and find them tracks, or the buzzards will pick his eye-balls out before night."

With considerable alacrity the Piegan mounted a pony bare-backed, and began circling, wider and wider. Two rifle muzzles followed him. In a minute, up the valley, he gestured. Whipple and Copp quirted their horses after him. To their eyes the unshod animals, keeping on the slopes and out of the buffalo dust, had left no tracks on the rocky acclivity; but the Indian, leaning low, pushed his pony at a swift lope. They cantered two miles up the valley, swung west over the eminence, then down upon the open plain, and headed into the southwest.

There in the knee-high grass Whipple picked up the double trail. The gelding sailed past Copp's horse and the pony like a yacht past a pair of tug boats.

"Go back to the horses and keep an eye on the Piegan," he shouted. "I'll be back directly."

THE track was as plain as if it had been laid down in new-fallen snow. The gelding followed with rein free; he had been trained to such work. He was a horse to be proud of; sixteen full hands high, sleek-coated, with the best horse blood of Montana in his veins, and cared for as a fine mount should be.

Many a lighter-limbed horse could pass him in a spurt; but on parade, or in a steady endurance run, Whipple had yet to see his equal. Always when Superintendent Van Haile, a lover of aristocratic mounts, visited the detachment on inspection, he would order Whipple to "drag out that high-stepping, high-nose gelding you're so touchy about and let me ride him today, Sergeant."

Brewhouse's iron-gray, a fleet, light horse, carried a rider considerably lighter than the gelding did. It had a twenty minute lead besides. But settling into its fastest steady pace, the gelding bore after.

Over sod, up gravelly slopes, through scattered timber belts, over sweet-scented acres of prairie roses, he kept his gait with only a touch now and then on the rein. The rhythmic *cluppety-cluppety-cluppety* of his hoofs ate into the miles; his black shiny body, flecking with foam, was tireless and smooth-working as a perfect machine.

As he topped the hills, Whipple swept the prairie with his glasses. The chase swung well over the boundary before he picked out his quarry, fording a swimming stream a mile ahead. In half an hour the gelding brought him within rifle distance of the Piegan. He shot into the air. The Indian used a rope whip mercilessly, till he realized he had no chance against the gelding, which closed up with ease. He unslung a repeating rifle.

One hundred and fifty yards away, Whipple saw the move barely in time. The gelding stopped short, all four feet braced. Whipple leaped off and gave him a low sharp word. The gelding sank down and "died."

At the same instant the Indian dismounted behind the gray. Whipple slid ten feet away from his horse and cocked his carbine. Dangerous as it was to himself, he waited for a clear shot, in order not to imperil Brewhouse's mount.

The Piegan's rifle spurted twice. To his horror, Whipple saw that the Indian was shooting not at him, but at the gelding. His purpose was clear as a flash. To kill his pursuer's mount in hopes of then escaping. He was standing up, his legs hidden by a clump of grass, his body hidden by the passing gray.

Whipple's teeth clicked together. He shot twice in quick succession. The first saved his black gelding's life at cost of Brewhouse's mount. The second, through the heart of the Piegan, avenged the gray.

BACK in the couloir, Copp examined the pack-horse's light burden with curious eyes.

"All one dollar bills, Whip. What's the sense in that?"

"To the Stonies a bill is a bill, I guess. They don't draw any distinction between a one and a ten. They'll sell a ten for three ones to any shyster."

"Well, we've got the stuff, so you'd better pull the saddle off that hoss of your'n. We've about done our share today. I'm thinking. You can't travel fast with them ribs laid open. Outside of that little cut, you sure got the best end of this deal, Whip. I wish I was setting as pretty as you'll be when you go riding back with this money."

"You don't know everything quite." Whipple informed him. "But what are you grumbling about? Your troop horses are at the post for you, and if Brewhouse got after those bloods, you can bet they'll be too."

"You don't know quite everything either," Copp flung back. "When Allerdyce sets eyes on me again, he sure won't wait for sunrise."

"What's up between you and Captain Allerdyce?"

"Gods, it sounds funny; but between you an' me an' the Piegan as we just gave the ponies an' a swift kick to, it ain't funny! You mind his dorter? Used to wear them hi-low dresses at the fort dances. You've been down there enough on furloughs that you orter mind her."

"Ruth Allerdyce!" Whipple pulled the saddle off the gelding and turned around. "What about her?"

"It's been brewing for some little time," Copp explained. "Her old man's been wanting to marry her off to a rising young infantry loot. But say, she just braced her feet an' balked. What I mean, she's a balker too, Whip. When she once sets her mind, you can't stop her with a two-inch rope an' a shade tree for a snubbing post. I know. Listen here.

"This rising young loot finds out that she was secretly engaged to some Steel-End land-grabber, some blue-nosed shyster here in Canady. Anyway that's what that rising young loot goes an' tells her pa. That sets off the fireworks. Allerdyce gets on a mean prod. Swears to cut her ears off. I wish to —— he had. Instead of that, he hands her over to me an' says:

" 'Copp,' says he, 'you and a detail take her east to Kick-Off and put her on a train. Tell the train conductor to lock her in the baggage car and watch her into Omaha, where I hope to heaven her two maiden aunts will dress her down proper!'

"For a day an' a night out of the fort, things was mulberry pie. She wouldn't stick in the buckboard, but hopped a hoss an' rode alongside me, chattering sweetly about anything or nothing. I orter seen what she was doing. She was working up on my blind side. You've seen her, Whip. You don't blame me, do you, for feeling foolish because she showed a preference for my company?"

Whipple shook his head without speaking.

"She had me curled around her little digit," Copp continued. "I got off my guard. Second night out, by all that's unholy, she up an' rode away in the dark by herself. I didn't miss her till plumb morning, when I rattled the bacon pan near the tent flap an' called her to breakfus'.

"She'd got clean away. I didn't have to be told where she went, but I nosed along her trail to get particulars. She fell in with a hoss outfit—man, wife an' wranglers, taking a herd into Alberty—an' got across the line. I sent my detail back to the fort; but me, I lit out after these bloods.

"I don't want to go back there till Allerdyce cools off. I may be courtmartialed, but that beats getting shot. That was three days ago—my eyes an' stars, Whip, you are bad wounded. Where're you sick, bud?"

Whipple, who had stood like a pillar with the heavy saddle on his arm, dropped it. Copp grabbed him by the shoulder.

"I didn't know she was coming," Whipple stammered, half aloud. "It must have happened so quick she had no time, no chance——"

"Easy, Whip," Copp tried to soothe him. "You just overdone yourself chasing that Piegan. You lay down an' keep quiet while I rustle——"

Whipple shook him off.

"Stay clear. You're dense as mud. Do you think I took all my furloughs down at the fort to visit my brother? Or chin around with bow-legged troopers like you? Don't you know that Lieutenant Berkhalter lied about who Ruth was engaged to? You grapehead, don't you see I've got to get back to the post? She's there at Badger settlement now, without knowing a soul or without knowing where I am!"

The light dawned on Corporal Pat Copp. He blinked owl-like and swallowed hard. Snicking his heels together, he walked off. Whipple could see him sitting on a rock a short distance away, and could hear him communing with an amazing variety of other-worldly characters. He died down after a while and sat head in hands. When he came back, Whipple had the mounts saddled and ready.

AT FULL noon two days later, the two dusty, fatigued men stopped in an arroyo for a brief rest. Copp's face had "subsided"; but Whipple's wound, unable to heal while he was in the saddle, had made him weak and feverish. All that day Copp had kept an eye on him and marveled at his grit. They had counted on reaching the post the evening before, but Copp's mount had gone too lame to carry; and the pack-horse could not keep up a pace faster than a walk.

Whipple looked at his watch.

"Copp, Brewhouse ought to be passing just to the south of us on intermittent patrol today.* I know, because I made out the schedule. We might find out how the land lays at the post. Suppose you ride the gelding up that swell and shoot a signal. Two shots quick, then one count three, then two more quick."

---

*Intermittent patrol, distinguished from regular patrol, was run at irregular intervals so that "interested parties" would not know when it was coming.

Copp rode off. After the signal Whipple listened for the answer. He heard nothing. But Copp galloped back up the arroyo without signaling again.

"Didn't get him, did you?"

"Just did an' nothing over. He's away southeast toward that little river with the three high hills."

Whipple nodded.

"He's watching the valley trail. I thought he might be. There's a whisky ranch somewhere in those hills. Now we'll get some news."

They did.

Forty minutes later Brewhouse signaled from near at hand and rode up the arroyo. His eyes looked like marbles when he saw the pack-horse, the U. S. Army trooper, and saw that Whipple was not exactly steady on his feet.

"Great spuds, Whip!" he cried, before he had swung out of the saddle. "You back again? I can't quite unkink this cussed tangle, but listen here. Van Haile's at the post. Things got into such a mess that he come to straighten 'em out. He straightened Remittance out, all right. Fanned him east to a desk job. But ——, Whip, *you're down for desertion!*"

"Desertion?"

Whipple could not find speech save for that single, ominous word. He could not realize its import fully. Brewhouse went on to explain.

"You rode off without orders. More'n that, against orders. And you broke arrest to get away. You said you were crossing the border into the States. That's desertion—flat. We all lied and said you rode after them Piegans, but it wouldn't hold water even with Van Haile. The charges looked so bad against you that I guess he can't be blamed for thinking you deserted."

"Hobble your jaw, son!" Copp snapped to Brewhouse, when he saw the effect of the news upon Whipple. "A little bit of that goes a long ways when a feller's about done up."

"What else, Ed??" Whipple demanded. "I might as well know it all now."

Copp grunted and walked away out of earshot while the other two talked for a minute. When Brewhouse mounted and rode off to his patrol, Copp came walking briskly back, whistling. Whipple sat on a rock, silent, his face drawn.

"My jig is danced, Copp," he groaned. "I'm caught. Ed's right about my breaking arrest and crossing the line. I thought I had shaken out of the hard lines. But this —it's the hardest yet. Lord—desertion!"

"But you're going back," Copp argued, "with the treaty money to boot. They'll have to believe ——"

"That won't make any difference. You'll see why. Lord—desertion!"

Unable to say anything that would help, Copp sat down on the same rock with his back to Whipple. For some minutes he gazed blankly up the arroyo where a siffleur was whistling like a hunter calling a dog. He got up suddenly and grabbed his saddle.

"Hop on, Whip. We ain't seen the end of this yet. Let's make the post by four o'clock. If they won't believe you when you tell the truth, they'll mebbe believe a spanking good lie. Give me your foot an' I'll boost you. I may be a grapehead, but between here an' the post I'll spill you a galloping earful, son."

THEIR coming was heralded by a shout from a constable who was directing three blood Indians how to spade a lettuce patch; and by a foot race out of barracks of the men not on patrol.

Corporal Slimp helped Whipple out of his saddle.

"Whip, old man," he said in a husky voice, "you're down for desertion."

"Dry up, you," Copp blazed, "or I'll bust your knob. Can't you see that Whip's about once in?"

A door opened in the officer's cabin and a tall, ruddy-faced officer came out. Whipple saluted him.

"The treaty money, sir ——" he started to report.

Copp interrupted.

"This man's sick," he said bruskly. "I'll do the reporting. He's got to have attention an' that right away."

"Corporal Slimp," Superintendent Van Haile ordered crisply, taking in the situation at a glance, "you and a constable convey Sergeant Whipple in to Badger and put him in care of Dr. Blanton there. Remember," he added significantly, "he is in your custody and you are directly responsible for him. Corporal, come with me."

He led the way back into the cabin and motioned Copp to a seat beside the window.

"There are several things which I want to know, Corporal ——"

"Corporal Patton Copp, Troop B, Second Cavalry, Montany," Copp informed him.

"A number of things I want to know, Corporal Copp. What are you doing so far away from your troop? How do you and Sergeant Whipple happen to come in with the treaty money? And so forth. Kindly give a full report."

"Some days ago," Copp began, in his straightest-faced fashion, "Captain Allerdyce sent me with a detail to escort his dorter east to the railroad at Kick-Off——"

"Please omit irrelevant details, Corporal. And kindly close that window beside you."

As Copp pulled down the window, he glimpsed a pair of yellow-striped legs disappearing around the corner. He left the window up a couple inches.

"Allerdyce was sending her to a couple Omaha aunts, because she was engaged to some man up here across the line. Capt'n Allerdyce ain't got anything against her marrying a good Canadian, I guess; but he'd heard that this particular Johnny Canuck was a blue-nose, Steel-End shyster."

"I don't want any story of a romance, Corporal," Van Haile interrupted again. "I'm not concerned just now with Captain Allerdyce and his daughter. What have they to do with your report?"

"A durned lot, sir," Copp affirmed. "As you'll see. This Miss Allerdyce got away from us one night an' high-tailed it across the line. I knew it was no use to foller her; she was heading for her fiancé. So I hurried back to report to Capt'n Allerdyce.

"On my way back I run across the scent of three bloods that my troop wants mighty bad. I noticed 'em out there just now dancing on a spade. Whipple told me they had broke out of the jug an' got away."

"Constable Brewhouse picked them up again. They were afoot."

"Then I'll have to ask for a detail to help me take 'em an' our troop hosses back to the fort, Capt'n."

"That will be arranged, Corporal. Please proceed with your report."

"Well, while I was chasing 'em, one morning I heard shooting an' investigated. Found Sergeant Whipple had caught up with nine Piegans, had cornered them, an' was about to get licked. I pitched in an' saved the day. We whaled the Indians to a standstill, except for one as got away on a hoss an' took the treaty money. Spite of being wounded, Whipple up an' after him on that black gelding, an' run the kyoty down in a two-hour chase. He oughtn't to have done it, being wounded thataway; but he said he'd come after the treaty money first an' dead Piegans second."

"I fear somebody is lying, Corporal," Van Haile said dryly. "Sergeant Whipple, by his own admission to the men here, did not follow the Piegans. He went straight for the Border."

Copp grinned; the grin broke into a chuckle.

"So Whipple took you in too?" he queried. "I'm surprized, sir. Coming back, he told me about that trick of his. Said this inspector—what's his name, Percival, or—anyway, the inspector was too slow in getting a pursuit detail started. Besides, that black gelding could travel faster than the other hosses.

"So rather than wait for a detail to get ready an' then be held back by it an' mebbe let the Piegans get across the border, he up an' after them alone. He had to go without waitin' for orders—against orders in fact; an' had to give the men that gab about not following the Piegans, or they wouldn't have left him run his nose into danger thataway."

Van Haile smiled indulgently and shook his head.

"That sounds plausible, Corporal. I'd like to believe it, but I can't. Sergeant Whipple deserted. I'm sorry. In a way, he can't be blamed. He had performed three consecutive fatigue duties just before he was sent out with the treaty money escort.

"In justice to him I must add that he had been hectored for six months previously by an officer who knew his own position was in danger if Whipple kept in good standing. The sergeant's hasty action upsets my plans for him completely. His commission is on its way to this post now. But as it is, all I can do is to mitigate the consequences of his desertion."

"Well, mebbe he did desert," said Copp, appearing to be open-minded. "I can't say. I'm just telling you what he told me. He might have been lying. Still, he come back, didn't he? An' brought the treaty money.

That don't look much like desertion to me."

"Are you a friend of his?" Van Haile asked casually.

"Never seen him till day before yesterday, sir."

"Hmm! I'll venture to explain his coming back with the money. On his way across the border he fell in with the Piegans by accident, and you and he fought it out with them. Then Sergeant Whipple thought the money would retrieve his hasty act, and came back with it. Is that not somewhere near the truth, Corporal Copp?"

"Don't prove it by me!" Copp snorted, carefully avoiding any show of partisanship. "I don't know. I'm telling you only what I heard an' saw. I'm sticking to facks. But they's one thing which sorta makes me believe he didn't ride off. In fact, it proves conclusively—but then maybe it doesn't ——"

"Let me hear it!"

Copp cleared his throat. He was playing his last card.

"You mind Whipple was supposed to come back from Badger drunk an' boisterous some time ago. Well, he was merely singing—so he says. He'd got a letter from his fiancée—so he says. Says she said she never would have the man her father wanted her to. That's what made Whipple come in singing—so he says. She said further that she was running off shortly an' joining him here. Now I happen to know that that's straight stuff anyway."

"How do you know?"

Copp turned over his last card slowly.

"Because Whipple's fiancée is the son of a gun that run off an' got me in trouble with Capt'n Allerdyce, her dad! Now here's the the p'int, Major: When Whipple knew she was going to join him here in a day or two, would he have deserted, d'you think, an' left her here alone, high an' dry?"

"Good gracious!"

Van Haile came to his feet and pulled at his sideburns.

"Is she—this Miss Allerdyce, a dark-eyed girl, about nineteen and tall? By Jove, she rode out here from Badger this morning and asked about Sergeant Whipple! I thought she was a relative. They look just a bit alike. I hadn't the heart to tell her the tr—what I thought then."

Copp saw he had scored; he pushed home the point.

"It was purty fine of Whipple to go after them Piegans just when she was coming, I think. He about rode my hip off getting here to her. I don't altogether blame him, Colonel."

"Hmmm!" Van Haile blew lustily through his nose. "Neither do I, Corporal. By Jove! If he knew she was coming, there can't be much doubt."

"Of course," Copp added, sublimely ignoring the last remark, "I can't say about Whipple, but if I'd known she was running off an' coming to me, I wouldn't have tried to desert an' get away, exactly."

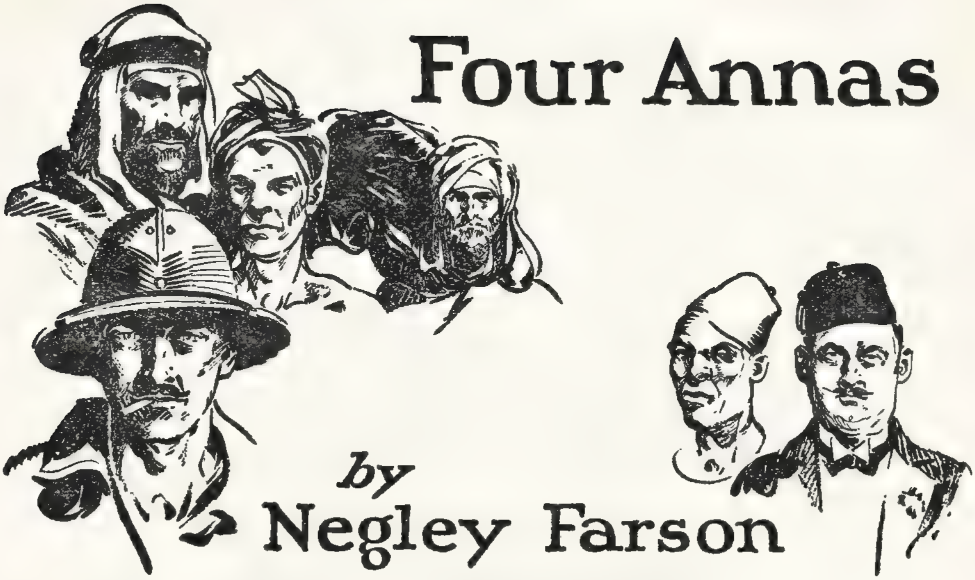
"Hmmm! I rather think that neither would I, Corporal."

Van Haile drummed on the table, looking distantly through the window. He got up suddenly, crossed the room and flung the window open.

"Constable!" he said severely. "Your curiosity is pardonable but your method of appeasing it is decidedly not! Go and get Whipple's black gelding ready for me. I am riding in to Badger immediately."

"But I'd sorta like to know what kind of a sentence Sergeant Whipple is going to get for deserting," Copp asked seriously. "You see, when I take these bloods an' hosses back, I've got to report something or other to Capt'n Allerdyce about his dorter."

"I'll arrange an escort detail for you when I come back," Van Haile answered. "You can spend a profitable hour or two appeasing the curiosity of these men outside the cabin. But, if you want to know, I rather think Inspector Whipple is shortly going to be sentenced for life."



Four Annas

by Negley Farson

Author of "The Common Grief," "The Man-Killer," etc.

THE *khamsin* came with the dawn. A belch of fiery hot air, a soft silty drizzle of sand, and No. X awoke to lick its lips and see a great yellow wall rushing down from up desert. Behind that they knew was a ninety-mile gale, a flat pounding gale driving a mountain of sand across the hot yellow waste—sand that would cut like a knife, put out a man's eyes, bury the camp——

Like sailors shortening sail on a ship they fought with their canvas. Bessanous were weighted with sandbags, planes anchored to pegs in the ground; marquees and bell tents lashed down by their guys. The flapping mess tent was struck—this in a smother of choking brown darkness—and then it was every man for himself.

Arab batmen and suffragies fled for the wady in back of the camp. The non-coms and men made for their mess—the best spot in camp—and the officers, after jamming their kits into uniform cases, picked up their water buckets, tied wet handkerchiefs over their mouths, put on their goggles—and fought their way to the bar.

This was a ramshackle structure made of old aeroplane crates, but calked like a ship against the sharp cutting sand; a comparative shelter, wherein they would ride out the storm. A man could breath there, at least.

Five months of the Libyan Desert had taught No. X much. A sun like white fire, a half-bucket of water per day, a thermometer that raced between 30 and 130 Fahr. every twenty-four hours—these had brought a new scale of values. And in that wisdom born of the solitudes they had learned that each man must be sufficient unto himself—a little armored fort, as it were—that he must never bare the nape of his neck to the sun, lest he live not long enough to inquire what had hit him, and that under no circumstances should he pour strong drink into himself before sunset.

But as a *khamsin* completely blots out the sun—and day is turned into night—this no longer held good. A man could drink as much as he pleased—which, No. X firmly believed, was the only way to get through a sandstorm.

In a few hours the stifling interior of No. X bar began to look like a revel. Booted, in shorts and wide open shirts, the once dapper officers of No. X, Royal Air Force, took on the aspect of pirates. A fine silt, continually sifting down from the roof, streaked their red, sweating faces, powdered their hair and made the tufted eye-brows of Major Macore look like haycocks.

He raised them now at a little drama he saw being staged in a corner—Smyth, that ex-Punjabi subaltern, was baiting some one again.

"——! I said: 'I'll take you!' Doesn't that make a bet?"

The words reached the major above the rasp of sand on the roof. Again—

"Look here! Do I have to stand on my head to make a bet sacred with you?"

The major craned his neck to see who the other man was. Bonijee probably. Bad blood there for some time. Yes, it was Bonijee. That affair had come to a head. The major, and every one else now, watched that pilot climb to his feet. Smyth's tone had a nasty, sinister quality to it. Bonijee looked about him uncertainly.

"You might think," he said, sneering faintly, "that you were hard up for cash."

"Cash! ——!" Smyth pawed the air. "Well, of all the —— cheek!"

It was truly a terrible thing for the heir of Smyth's Soaps to be accused of pecuniary disablement! That young officer was short on many things, but cash was not one of them. He blew out his fat cheeks.

"In the Indian Army," he said stiffly, "all bets are paid before sundown next day. And we don't argue about them—either!"

"But I tell you—" Bonijee seemed quite bewildered—"it wasn't a bet. We never shook hands. And I'm not going to pay you twenty quid just because——"

"It's my opinion," said Smyth, addressing himself to the gathering in general, "that this fellow's a dirty little welsher. Give me a whisky and soda."

Now there could be but one answer to that.

And thinking of this the major smiled to himself, for the men were evenly matched and he was bored to the teeth. Leaning over, he suggested to the doctor, *sotto voce,* that he was willing to consider a bet.

"A quid—either way."

Perhaps it was the silence that warned him, a peculiar tautness about it—or the dawning expression of amazement he saw on the face of the doctor—for he looked up in time to see the thing for himself. Bonijee, with a sickly grin on his face, was backing away toward the door.

"GHASTLY! Never saw such a thing in my life!"

The *khamsin* had gone; No. X had dug itself out; and in that first cool sunset after the storm, those smothering days, the endless screech of the gale, the Bonijee affair, all seemed almost like a bad dream. Incredible! The major reached out a slim tatooed arm for his whisky.

"Couldn't have been this?"

He nicked the glass with his finger.

The doctor shook his head moodily.

"And a good pilot, too! That's the —— of it." The major sighed, and scowled at the scarlet sun sliding down behind the far purple desert—that unescapable sun which works such havoc under the skull of the white man. "I can't understand it. I've seen some queer birds in my time—but I'm blest if I ever saw an Englishman back down like that. Positively disgusting!"

The doctor cleared his throat, rubbed his jaw reflectively.

"Smyth says he isn't an Englishman."

"*What?*"

The doctor had a casual way of announcing the most momentous event. Irritating. Just as he had been thinking it over, deciding whether he ought to tell about it.

"Not an Englishman!" The major glared at the doctor, "Well then, what *is* he? That's what I'd like to know."

"Same here." The doctor uncrossed his lean hairy legs and arose. "Smyth said he was going to show us tonight. Hope Bonijee swats him."

IT WAS Guest Night—a rare event in the desert—and No. X was donning its smartest khaki and buttons. Along the long line of marquees red faces were bobbing in and out of green canvas washstands; Arab batmen were shuffling about bearing spotless tunics, polished boots, being warned that if they hadn't "polish 'em *quiesketeer, sabe?*" they would be jolly well whipped. Six officers of the Bikaneer Camel Corps, Column—*pukka* regulars—were coming to dinner.

Like two ships in the yellow sea of those sands, No. X and the Bikaneers had been cruising the Senussi country. Arabi Ali, the crafty brain behind the Egyptian uprising, had slipped through the British dragnet in Cairo—with several English lives to his credit—and was thought to be hiding with the Senussi people in Libya. And for five weary months No. X and the Bikaneers had been patrolling the caravan trails, raiding oases, tirelessly watching the smug, mysterious face of those sands, so that Arabi Ali could be stood up before a mud wall and shot. So far, without any luck—for the British.

The Bikaneers swung in at sunset, their silver shoulder chains twinkling like light; the white officers, lean-jawed, leather-red under their topees—proud as Lucifer. The camels picked their way superciliously down the officers' lines and at the command folded themselves up like jack-knives, their bearded Rajputs standing stiff at their heads.

"Hallo there!" No. X major saluted his guests. "How about a peg before mess?"

And as if such meetings were but a daily matter of course these imperturbable gentlemen strolled off to the bar.

IT WAS a brave sight under the yellow droop of the tent. Yellow candlelight, shining brass, glistening silver, decorations and ribbons. The white-robed, turbaned, red-belted suffragies grinned as they served. A proud, splendid, masterful picture, very dignified and correct.

Bonijee, from the depths of his tent, had watched the Bikaneers ride in. An hour later, when the gong sounded dinner, he was sitting in the selfsame position, head in hands, staring into the black emptiness of the desert.

"Meester Captain, pleese, effendi," his perplexed batman tried to arouse him. "Sahib—you sick?"

Bonijee jumped at the touch, dashed off the timorous hand. But the faithful Ahmed persisted; blows were an old story to him. He dodged about, found and lighted a candle, pointed to Bonijee's tunic—fresh and clean on his cot:

"Pleese, Meester Captain——"

Bonijee stared at the uniform, its crown-crested buttons dazzlingly bright. Then he arose and slowly pulled on the cool gaberdine.

He steeled himself as he drew near the mess, so much so that he entered it smiling. He walked up to the major's table at the head and conformed to the etiquette of a correctly run mess by apologizing for having been late. He received that officer's pardon, bowed in acknowledgement and turned back to his own particular table. He smiled mechanically at the set faces there, threw one leg over the bench, and suddenly froze in this posture.

There, glistening bright on his plate, was a small silver coin.

He stared at it a moment while the blood left his face; then he sucked in his breath, gasped as if some one had hit him and slowly reached out his hand.

"That—" Smyth leaned across the table—"that explains *you*."

"I say!" the Bikaneer beside Major Macore gave him a dig in the ribs, "what the deuce is that fellow playin' at? Walkin' right out again! What?"

The major lied automatically.

"Sun. Rotten case. Doesn't know what he's doing. Here—this chutney's not bad."

The doctor pretended he had choked on a fig.

"Out in Mespots," he said, collecting the eyes on the table, "I remember a chap—knocked out in his tent!"

He stared understandingly at the major while the conversation drifted to the white fire of the sun, topees, spine pads and the new actinic-proof cloth.

"If you'll excuse me," he said when he saw the awkward incident safely lied out of, "I'll be taking a look at my patient."

Once clear of the tent he set off on the run for Bonijee's marquee; he found that young officer staring down at his Webley.

"Hel-lo!" piped the doctor, "that's a nasty thing to do after dinner!"

A man could not kill himself in the face of such ridicule; anger interposes. Bonijee tossed the gun on his cot.

"Well," he said. "What about it?"

The doctor tested a camp chair, sat down and stretched out his legs.

"Have you got a cigaret I can smoke?

"Not that I mind," he remarked, selecting a Player from the tin almost hurled at him. "As you say, it's your business. Only—" he puffed, staring at the sullen averted figure before him—"it takes nerve. Must take a —— of a lot of nerve to get rid of oneself?"

Bonijee stared down at his shoes, trim, elegant footgear—too smart, almost, for the desert.

The doctor stared at them also—and frowned.

"So I'm wondering," he said, "why you didn't hit Smyth. What's a punch in the nose!"

"I—" Bonijee jerked up his head. "Oh, for ——'s sake clear out!"

The doctor carried on, unperturbed.

"People," he said, "set such store on a punch in the nose. Every gentleman should have one in his kit. Not that it means a —— thing, mind you; but—well, there you are.

"Perhaps," he suggested after a pause, "you hadn't seen it that way?"

"Hadn't seen it!" Bonijee's lips parted in a ghastly hint of a smile. "My ——! It's nothing so simple as that. This is different— I'm—I'm a——"

Terror suddenly came into his eyes, as if, looking inward, they saw some monster there.

"Doc," he whispered, his finger tips at his mouth, "do you believe in heredity? Do you think a man can be run by some one inside him? Some one who died—oh, ages ago?"

"Eh? Why—of course!" The doctor was thankful to have this ugly interview reach such a sane basis. "Quite a lot, I dare say. Fellow's ancestors, y'know."

Bonijee looked as if the monster had won; he nodded, hopelessly.

"Ah," he muttered, "then you'll understand now. You'll know. He's always been there—always. Smyth knew. I never hit a man in my life—I get sick. I can't do it! Oh, my God, if you could know what it's been!"

"Always?" the doctor leaned forward. "You mean——?"

"My grandfather," said Bonijee, "was a Bengali babu."

THE yellow moon had slid into Africa and the mists of night had come on when the doctor strode through the black mounds of the tents to the major's marquee. He found that worthy awake, a book in his hand, whisky and cigarets by his side. The doctor reached for the whisky.

"Mac," he answered the expectant stare of the major, "what'd you say if I told you Bonijee was a sort of human chameleon?"

"That you were somewhat tighter than usual."

"Huh. Well, my boy, it's a fact! You saw him do it yourself."

"I— What?"

"Yes, in the bar, when he backed out of that fight. Remember how he came up, jumped—just as if he meant to hit Smyth—and then wilted! Face changed and everything, and that awful grin that he gave?"

"Horrible!"

"Well, he was changing color right then, turning from white man to black—or whatever color you'd call a Bengali babu."

The major sat up in bed.

"I say—you don't *mean* there's something nasty like *that?*"

"Yes—" the doctor chewed at his pipe—"it's not a nice story."

It was a sordid tale he related, a story that had its beginning fifty-odd years before in Benares, when a white woman married old Chunder Bonijee. "She couldn't have been much of a lady." Their son was a sagacious Eurasian, who prospered, and—believing that money can get what it wants in this world—strove to buy his way into the dominant race. A home in England, another white woman, willing to break the law of her color—and then their son, grandson of Old Chunder—blue-eyed, fair, sent to Harrow and Oxford, to come out the perfect English gentleman, accent and all. Victory.

"But," said the doctor, "old Chunder wasn't so easy to get rid of as that. Not by a —— sight. There's a lot of him living in Bonijee now. Sleeping, as you might say, in the subconscious. Whenever Bonijee gets in a jam, has his feelings stirred up—the old babu wakes up.

"All that's been put on in England, public school, Oxford—" the doctor made a move with his hand—"that's all brushed aside and the old babu looks out."

"Ugh!" the major shuddered. "That's a nasty idea."

"Ay—he's there!—looking out. And when he sees fists, he gets sick—and his muscles won't act—just like any other Bengali. That's what's the matter with Bonijee."

"Goes nigger, eh?"

"Something like that."

The major pondered a moment. "Well, you know what they say, 'One drop of black blood——' "

"Utter rot!" The slap of the doctor's hand on his bare knee came like a shot. "I thought you'd say that. Think a moment—that would make black blood stronger than white!"

"But, look here——"

"You forget! Bonijee is three-quarters white. So does he. He thinks that he is everlastingly ——ed, the fool! I caught him loading his Webley."

The major started, then looked straight ahead:

"Wouldn't it have been—almost better?"

"Not exactly." The doctor smiled wryly. "'Twould have been dashed hard to explain. Besides—it's our fault.

"Yes—" he waved the protesting man on the cot into silence—"we're to blame—the whole priggish white race. We're too fiendishly conceited. White blood! Why we treat a crossbreed as if he were scum—unclean. —— near diseased! No wonder the poor —— gets to think so himself. That's why a breed is never worth a good ——. We won't let him be. But—" the doctor shoved his pipe at the major—"if Bonijee has guts enough to kill himself, he has enough to do what I say."

The doctor went on abstractedly, as if diagnosing a case.

"Told him, for instance, that he was a case of two-men-in-one. Bengali part gets him in trouble—white man feels disgraced and tries to get out. Can't always do it. Besides, as he's three-quarters white—and living with white men—he can't go around explaining about the Bengali. It won't do him good. —— of a life to go on with! So I told him to make up his mind. What's it to be? White man or black? Next time he gets in a tight place and the old babu shows up he's got to make the white man win out. Case of fighting himself."

The major considered this intricate and very far-fetched.

"Humph—he'll not do it here. I'm having no bloody chameleons in my squadron!"

"No," mused the doctor, "they'd torture him here. Just the way they drop those scorpions into petrol—to see what they do. Fact is, this country makes a brute of a man. I told him to go home—to his people—and work it out there. Some place where he can think without getting a headache. I can fake the red tape."

On the following morning Bonijee was flown off to railhead.

The major, watching the plane vanish into the colorless sky, cursed the loss of such an excellent pilot.

Smyth explained to a curious group on the *tarmac* the episode of the coin.

"Four anna piece. It's a way we have of taping the breeds—out in India. Color's ranged on the rupee; eight annas, halfbreed; four annas, quarter—they all know what it means. Spotted him by that 'jee' on the end of his name—and the way he crawled out of that fight. Nasty worm. What?"

But the doctor, leaning wearily across his desk in the medical tent, read and reread where he had perjured himself. Across the "movement order," instructing Lieut. A. Bonijee to proceed to Ras el Tin Hospital he had written the simple word, "sun."

NOW if you step down from Shepeards veranda, turn to the right and walk sharp for five minutes, you will stand in the underworld of the world's wickedest city—the Waza. A different world all in all from the Semiramis hotels; a world of veiled women, twisting streets, mosques, scrolled mesreybiahs, blubbering camels—Arab Cairo.

In that labyrinth of mud dwellings which sprawls between the Muskie and the tombs of the Mamelukes, it is said, nearly anything can happen—and most everything does. In it vices are practised so sickeningly sweet that no one can withstand their seduction. White men have been known to go down there and—vanish. Murdered? Who knows? No one ever found out, no white man, that is—for the Waza is the one spot in Egypt beyond the reach of the British. The heart of the East—five minutes from Shepeards.

So it came that when the doctor of No. X Squadron was receiving chits from Ras el Tin Hospital, informing him that one Lieut. A. Bonijee—"touch of sun"—had failed to report; when he was getting stern official notes from Middle East, Air Force, demanding the whys and wherefores of this—"Why had he dared to send down such a serious case unescorted"—and when the entire police of the Delta were scouring Cairo, Alex., and towns near the railroad, their native spies dogging innocent and perfectly unsuspecting young pilots, Lieut. Algernon Bonijee lay on the soft divan behind the *mesreybiah* of Solomon's bazaar. He lay on his back and blew smoke rings into the hot, scented air.

"Hassan," he asked lazily, "do you believe in me now?"

The tawney-faced youth occupying the other end of the divan smiled enigmatically.

"You never say yes or no, do you, Hassan?"

Voices from the other parts of the room answered quickly:

"We do, we do, Bonijee, *effendi*—please, go on with the lesson."

And Bonijee, still lying flat on his back, spoke as follows:

"With the Lewis, in case it suddenly ceases to fire, first, strike the drum sharply twice with the flat of the hand—thus—in anticlockwise direction."

He gave two swift cuts with the edge of his hand to illustrate clearing operation for a No. 1 stoppage.

The students, seated crosslegged about the Lewis set up on the floor, examined it curiously.

"And then," asked one, "what then, Bonijee, *effendi*, if thees thing should no have the anticipated result?"

Bonijee smiled and in the even singsong that he had picked up from a succession of sergeant instructors explained in detail how to overcome the stoppages and jams which halt the deadly work of the Lewis machine-gun. As a scout pilot he could recite the whole catechism asleep; he had been trained to execute all movements, one hand, in the air, so that he was very expert indeed.

This, in fact, had been his *carte d'admission* into Nationalist circles. The Egyptians, if they hoped to win against the highly organized English, needed machine-guns—and gunners. Guns could be stolen, or smuggled into the country; but the gunners presented a problem. These had to be trained—and there was no one to do it.

Bonijee knew this, because the British were ever careful not to train native troops in the use of such highly effective methods of slaughter. His services, therefore, were worth something.

And it had been a comparatively easy transition, this switch of allegiance—in Egypt, where every foreigner hates the British. Much of the Nationalist support came from the dagoes—as British officers were wont to call the Greek, French and Italian colonies. Bonijee had talked so himself. But now, when landing in Cairo, instead of boarding the noon train for Alex., at the foot of whose breakwater lay Ras el Tin Hopital, he hailed a gharry and drove to the Italian Club, where he asked for one Viviano.

Viviano laughed and then became highly indignant. Had he been picked for a fool? What nonsense was this? And it was not until Bonijee, desperate, had related the whole affair in the desert, shown the four anna piece, and put forth the idea of machine-guns that the suspicious Italian condescended to listen. The outcome was a dinner that night, at which Hassan, the young El Azhar student, formed a third of the party.

"I have brought you together," said the still skeptical Viviano, "and I tell you now, Mr. Bonijee, that if you are playing us tricks—if you are a spy, for example—that you will die very shortly, and no one will know how it happened."

Whereupon Bonijee nodded to the suffragie to fill up his glass; and, looking over the wine, he smiled and spoke to Hassan.

"I'm not an Englishman." He tossed a small silver coin on the table, the four anna piece. "That's what I am. An Englishman gave me that as an insult—to show that I wasn't white. That's what they think of themselves. If a man isn't English, then he's not worth a——! French and Italians they call dagoes. And you and I, Hassan, are niggers!"

He jumped to his feet.

"Egypt for the Egyptians!"

And Bonijee took off his tunic, spat on the proud wings he had worn with such merit and ground his heel on his ribbons.

"Get me some mufti," he said, "and a *tarboosh*, so that I may be dressed as a gentleman."

So, in a fashion altogether different from that which the doctor had urged, Bonijee returned to his people.

IN THE weeks that followed, the revolt spread through Egypt. Not since the days of the Pharoahs had the land of the Nile known such ferment. The coffee stalls were glutted with whispering conspirators; students marched through the streets; little juntas of fellaheen met in the marshes—the welling-up of a human volcano. The British, playing polo out on Gezireh, sometimes fancied their mallets were sabers, played with slightly more savagery; and the talk in the Turf Club turned from horses to Brownings.

"I've sent my wife home," a political officer informed a colonel of ghurkas. "This will be a massacre if it starts."

"*If* it starts! *If—!*" the colonel voiced the rage of the Army. "You chaps are too blind for words. All palaver. What we need now is force! Establish a funk!" He bit the ends of a regulation moustache. "Let me into El Azhar, with about two hundred men—and their *kukries*—and I'd cut the heart right out of this bloody Moslem sedition!"

The political officer shook his head.

"El Azhar is a mosque. We never interfere with native religion.

"Religion,——! El Azhar knows but one creed—'kill the British'! Murder—that's all they worship in there, regardless of color or creed."

IN THE *suk* of Ibn Yusuf, the gunsmith, Bonijee heard much discussion.

"We are Orientals," that graybeard argued one day, "and those soldiers, smoking their pipes up there in the citadel, do not understand us. We are dogs. They come down here with their sticks, and they swagger about, and they push us off into the street, and knock off our turbans—and we smile!"

Ibn Yusuf picked up a thin, fluted blade, almost whip-like in texture.

"And I am sharpening this."

Bonijee nodded understandingly; and the hand in the cheap mufti pocket closed on the four anna piece.

Things had gone far with Bonijee; so far that he indeed looked like a native. Perhaps it was that the red *fez* brought out the Eastern cast of his features—something which lurked there all the while. Even Viviano had mentioned it, startled almost, at the picture of Bonijee sitting cross-legged there.

"*Ecco!* If it were not for your eyes——"

Those suede shoes that had seemed so out of place in the desert did not seem incongruous here. The Waza admired them.

And in those sun-scorched hours when the Waza drowsed in sleepy, fetid apathy behind scrolled *mesreybiahs*, each pent alleyway between the low mud walls radiating nauseous heat, Bonijee lay on the divan and dreamed dreams with Hassan. The English gone, Egypt would be paradise—flowered gardens, cool and green, marbled baths, dancing girls— Once the English were gone.

He saw Indian regiments marched into Cairo and cursed his awkward pupils about their machine-guns.

"Quick—you must be ready!"

He saw *ghurkas* patrolling the Waza—and swore at Hassan.

"Why do we wait? Are our leaders afraid?"

It was worse than holding one's breath.

"*La ilaha ill'allah, wu Muhamed razul allah!*"

He bowed his head to the flags of El Azhar mosque—that red heart of Islam—and fumed at its philosophical calm. A thousand turbans nodded toward Mecca, a thousand tongues slowly intoned the Koran—as they had done for a thousand years. The city within those red walls ruled the Musulman world; from Morocco to the hills of the far off Hindu Kush its word was the law. Yet it seemed lost in dreams.

Then one night came Hassan.

"*Wallah!*" That fierce youth waved his fists. "We have done it! I, myself, killed two at least."

He told the story of the Cairo-Luxor Express:

"Palm trees on the track—village of Abba—seven Englishmen—officers—fought with their belts—and as one ran I cut—*so*—in his back. . . ."

Bonijee felt an instant terror, saw the picture itself, the dash across the hot yellow sand, the mob in pursuit, the sharp knife-thrust of Hassan, the bloody, sprawled figure in khaki.

"Tomorrow—" Hassan ran his tongue the whole way round his lips—"that blow will ring round the world. Egypt has struck!"

"But—but—" the thought harrowed Bonijee—"was this fellow armed?"

Hassan sniggered.

"We caught them at breakfast."

"Umm, I see—no use of making 'em prisoners?"

Hassan laughed at the thought; this was a war without quarter. No use in being polite. Besides— He closed his lips suddenly.

"Come."

They crossed the flaming street of the Muskie, dropped down narrow tortuous streets, dead bazaars, into the very heart of the Waza—a pit of whispers, flitting shapes, hands that reached out and clutched from the darkness. A white wall, a black archway; and Hassan, breathing audibly, rapping twice, then thrice, on the gate.

"Do you know where you are?" Hassan found his arm. "10 Ismail Pacha!"

"10 Ismail Pacha!" Involuntarily Bonijee drew back. This was the Downing Street of the Nationalists. He had known that some day he would come here, had wanted it so. But now——

A shaft of light hit his eyes. He made out a bearded face behind the grated port of the gate, heard Hassan whispering in low gutteral Arabic, and then the rasp of the bolts.

"*Saieda.*"

A white-robed figure bowed as they entered, led them across a court drenched with moonlight, into an opening that gaped like a black mouth at its end. Here he left them. Hassan helped Bonijee's groping feet to find a flight of stone steps. Two flights they climbed, to see a square of star-studded sky, and emerge in white moonlight. Below lay the roofs of the city. Silver plates. A mosaic of light and plush shadows, twinkling flame; a thousand minarets reached fingerlike, wistfully, toward a pale cobalt sky.

"Aha!"

At the voice, Bonijee swung round, and stared at the figure approaching. A disconcerting, incongruous figure! A sleek, plump little man, wearing an extraordinarily well-fitting dinner jacket and red native fez. He held out a soft, moist, white hand.

"*Bon soir, m'ieu.*"

Bonijee took it, stared at the smiling round face before him, the trim, waxed mustache, arched eyebrows and cigaret dangling from the red, pouting lips, too surprized to utter a word. This elegant figure—here on the roof top!

The stranger marked his astonishment; he smoothed the silken pleats of his shirt.

"Ha-ha. Yes, I am a cosmopolitan gentleman. Please——"

He led them to a pile of soft cushions on that part of the roof overlooking 10 Ismail Pacha and continued:

"I should wear a burnoose—eh?—to be quite *comme il faut?* But I have traveled all over the worl'."

In a soft voice, with the slightest trace of a lisp, the cosmopolitan gentleman talked of his travels, his pleasures, the traits he had picked up, the knowledge acquired.

"So," he said, suddenly switching the conversation to Bonijee, "I understood when Hassan came to me about you. I knew that there is discontent among the British—even as there is here. I make it my business to know such things as this. And it was quite conceivable, to me, that you were what you said, and not a spy, or an *agent provocateur*. So I told them not to kill you—just yet."

Bonijee shifted uncomfortably, and the cosmopolitan gentleman smiled.

"We have our way of finding things out—many ways. It might interest you to know, for example, that the doctor of your squadron is in Cairo at this moment. There was some scandal, I believe, over your—your—'touch of sun'—and he is without work at the moment."

Hassan chuckled.

"He is at the Hotel Continental, your Excellency."

A twitch passed over the suave features of the cosmopolitan gentleman, just a momentary hardening of feature, followed by a sharp sentence in Arabic. And Bonijee, watching Hassan, saw that student stiffen, bite down on his lips—as if they had brought him to danger.

"REVOLUTION," continued the cosmopolitan gentleman, "is an art. There is the subtle, psychological moment—like the work of an excellent chef. One minute too soon—one too late—and the whole dish is ruined. Everything must be measured just so!" With thumb and forefinger he demonstrated just how exact things must be. "And now, tonight, everything is quite ready."

The cosmopolitan gentleman sighed and lighted a fat cigaret.

In the pause Bonijee was conscious of the vastness, the immensity of approaching events; what tomorrow would mean——

Cries came from the black street below; from far off in the troubled heart of the *Waza*, the *thud-thud* of a tomtom—a heartbeat—and Bonijee pictured the blood lust of that horde—the wild fluttering rush, guests on Shepeard's veranda, shots, the white flash of knives.

"It has been difficult," continued the cosmopolitan gentleman, strangely in line with Bonijee's thoughts, "to awaken our people. For so long have they toiled under the heel of one despot or another that they have the slave spirit. They are like leopards born in captivity—tame until they taste blood."

At the word Bonijee started; it was said with such emphasis.

"Leopards," said the cosmopolitan gentleman," make magnificent pets—as long as they do not lick your hand. You should never let them do that; because a leopard has a rough tongue, and after a few licks he rasps blood. And when he tastes that, he eats you! Very simple, *n'est ce pas?*"

Bonijee looked at him fearfully; what was he trying to say? For answer the cosmopolitan gentleman waved his arm over the sweep of the Waza. The tomtom was much louder now. Bonijee heard the low roar of upraised angry voices—a growl?

"*Voila!*" smiled the cosmopolitan gentleman. "My leopard!

"Yesterday," he continued, "we held up the Cairo-Luxor Express. Yes? And we caught seven Englishmen, which we thereupon killed. And you will notice, if you read your paper this morning, what the English said about the affair. Not one word—yes?"

The cosmopolitan gentleman smiled and licked his mustache. A gleeful, catlike expression.

"Absolute silence. Why? M'sieu, they knew that one spark, such as that, would set fire to Egypt. They tried to prevent it, to let the fact die of itself, and then make us pay for it all later on—when they have us in hand. But it is I who planned that affair—" The cosmopolitan gentleman tapped himself on the chest, pointed down into the Waza— "I desired some blood for my leopard! *Attendez!*"

He arose and clapped his hands for a suffragie. The white-robed servant appeared, bowed timidly and shuffled off to obey the order received.

Below surged the mob of the Waza, a swirling mass about two central figures, two huge natives, who shouted and held up some wares. Bonijee, leaning precariously outward, saw the servant fight his way through to the hawkers, take what it was he was after and struggle clear of the mob.

A roar answered a sentence the cosmopolitan gentleman hurled down from the roof. He turned to face Bonijee.

"Do you know what those hawkers are selling down there?"

The truth was hammering at the doors of Bonijee's consciousness; but he was fighting it off, struggling, straining to master the nausea within him. Almost fainting, he watched the cosmopolitan gentleman reach out and gingerly take something from the platter the suffragie presented. Mechanically, he obeyed the nod of that sly, catlike face—and held out his hand.

Something dropped in it—something red, soft—with a slightly sweet odor.

"Ten piastres a pound," said the cosmopolitan gentleman, "for fresh English meat!"

He was smiling and rubbing his hands.

"Fresh English meat—killed yesterday morning."

It was very much like a wave, the heave and lift of his senses—the nausea. Then it happened; the snap of something inside him.

"You —— gippy! You *beast!*"

His fist smashed the cosmopolitan gentleman's mouth. The pulpy give of the flesh, the instant sharp pain from the teeth, was ecstacy! He struck again and again.

"You —— nigger! You——"

Long piercing burns—he felt the knife thrusts of Hassan. Agony such as he had never known in his life; torture that made him cry out, cut his strength, so that he felt his grip failing on the screaming figure he clutched. A moment, when he fought for calm in his chaos, a drawing in of all things, dimming lights—a fleet instant of clear vision—then he made his decision. His muscles answered the call—a lurch, and he gained the edge of the roof. With the frantic man in his grasp he toppled off into space.

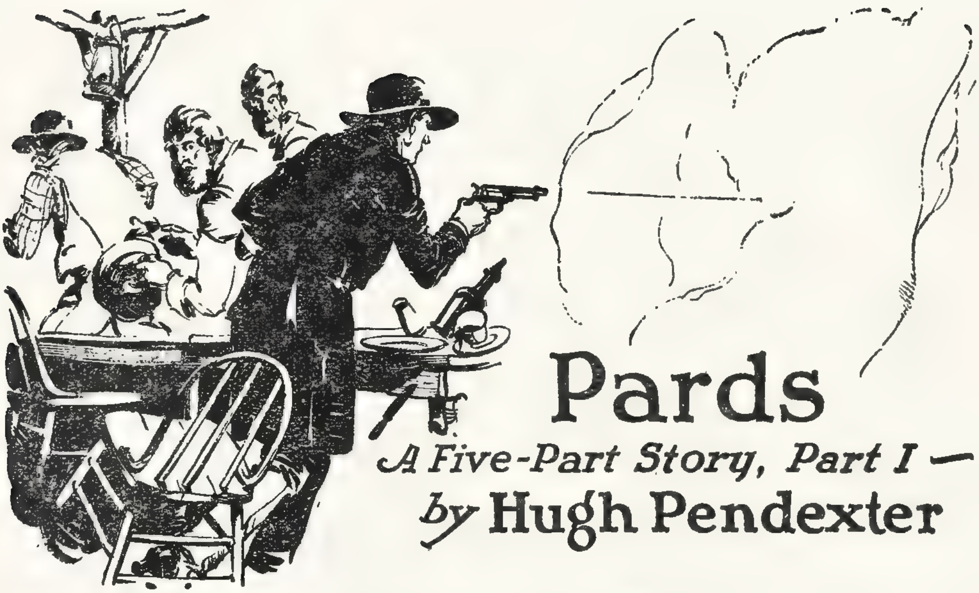
"THAT man," said the political officer, "the one in the dinner jacket, is Arabi Ali himself—and he's dead as a mackerel. Fact! Man we've been hunting all over —— for—and we find him dead in the street! The other? —— if I know. This is a most amazing affair! Found 'em piled up together, and this fellow gibbering English! Yes, he passed out right away. Cut to bits. Nothing to identify, went through his pockets; just some gippy knickknacks—and this. What? You know him?"

The doctor had snatched the four anna piece; it glistened bright on his palm.

"Speak, man!" cried the political officer. "Don't stand there like that. Who—what is he? A white man—or what?"

The doctor stared at the calm face of Bonijee, inscrutable, yet, somehow, content. He shook his head slowly.

"I'm blest if I know."



Pards

A Five-Part Story, Part I

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Bush Lopers," "The Homesteaders," etc.

FOREWORD

BEGINNING in 1859 a new gold fever was epidemic in the Western continent. From the Missouri river to the Atlantic such purely domestic problems as the bloody strife in Kansas and Missouri, John Brown's activity at Harper's Ferry, and the high temperature of political passions in the North and South, were boiling a big pot of trouble for the United States. When a pony-express rider, racing west, cried out through the night to an east-bound coach, "Lincoln's elected!" the stage was fully set for grim tragedy.

During this excitable period, war had assailed the foundations of Italy and was threatening the general stability of Europe. Along with their consumption of "Jayhawker" and "Border Ruffian" news, the press had made familiar to its readers such names as Emperor Napoleon and King Victor Emanuel, Emperor Francis Joseph, Cavour, Garibaldi, Hess and Neil.

But gold is never to be denied and, while war blazed around the world and the news of Bull Run was a month in reaching the Sierra Madre, seekers of the precious metal moved in armies into what was first the western end of Kansas, then the Territory of Jefferson and then the Territory of Colorado. The financial collapse of 1857 had prepared the country for responding to the cry, "Pike's Peak or Bust," and had furnished the tens of thousands of adventurers.

And there set forth the greatest single emigration ever witnessed in the New World, the movement of one hundred thousand people in one season across the plains, until the wagons might be said to form one continuous train from the Missouri to the mountains.

Less than halfway across the continent this new gold land was between the great trails leading up the Platte and Arkansas, and had been visited by few, and these were mountain men. Migration to Utah, Oregon, California, the new diggings of Idaho and Montana, passed north of Colorado. Those bound for New Mexico and California passed to the south.

These two big trails were two hundred and fifty miles apart at the hundred and third meridian. For years it had been customary for dragoon regiments to pass up one trail, along the eastern base of the mountains and return home by the other trail. These maneuvers were intended to impress Sioux, Pawnee, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, Kiowa and Apache with the idea that it was bad medicine to take liberties with the white man. From their mountain fastnesses the Utes saw the troops of Dodge

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and Sumner and Sedgwick make the summer journey. But that blight to Indian life, the covered wagon, did not appear until after some Cherokee Indians and white men found color on Cherry creek.

With bewildering swiftness this isolation vanished. Once Gregory and Russell and California gulches were heralded to the world, there swarmed through the Indian range those hardy men who brought their own nomenclature from every state in the Union, and who were soon to demand passenger and express service, mail routes, a territorial government and statehood. Jealousy and rivalry were quickly transplanted to what had been an uninteresting and unknown land.

Denver on the gentle plains slope was hedged in on all sides except the east by competing "cities." The national fondness for making laws was evidenced where but yesterday the notions of the Utes had been supreme. The provincial government of the Territory of Jefferson clashed with the Miners' and People's Claim Clubs and courts, as well as with the Arapahoe county government of Kansas.

Guerilla warfare in Missouri and Kansas turned travel from the valley of the Arkansas to the valley of the Platte, and Colorado City no longer could compete with Denver for the patronage of incoming hordes. The man who turned his oxen out to die in the fall of 1859, and found them fat in the spring, was the father of the stock-raising industry. His discovery was to rival in importance John H. Gregory's famous find. And where for ages the grim mountains had cast shadows on no human habitation more stable than the red man's tepee the white man's stout houses began to spring up like seed sown in good soil.

The white man's virtues and vices clashed, with the mighty Rockies for a background. From the solemn pineries along Cherry creek and Upper Platte and from lone gulches and hidden cañons, from mountain passes and crests of ranges, never before, perhaps, trodden by the white man, rose the babel of white voices, exulting or despairing. And the god of the things that may happen watched the forward and the backward wage the ancient strife, the endless repetition of earth's oldest story, and one that earth's children never tire of hearing.

CHAPTER I

THE SINGING PILGRIM

THIS summer of 1862 was very prosperous in nearly all the Colorado diggings, and California Gulch was the richest of them all. Until gold seekers stumbled upon it in the fall of 1859 and struck color, it was insignificant. It contained little of beauty to attract the eye when first seen by white men. Placer mining had brought ugliness to the little ravine. It was the biggest gold camp in the mountains.

It consisted of a short, narrow valley, one of the many similar tributaries to the Arkansas valley. A slender stream of muddy water ran through it and it was hemmed in closely by hills. Much of the timber on the slopes had been cut or burned. Much that remained consisted of dead trunks and formed a desolate frame to the unshapely picture. Trenched and gashed and burrowed by two seasons of gold hunters, there was nothing desirable in the aspect to one looking down from up the slope.

Nathan Goss, meditating over an excellent cigar, kept his gaze fastened on the distant mountains, shouldering high above the puny hills. Opposite the mouth of California Gulch was Mount Massive, at whose base was Frying Pan Gulch, two years old as diggings, and soon to be rechristened Colorado Gulch. Apparently not so high as Pike's Peak, in reality the king of the Rockies, Mount Elbert in the southwest, thrust its dominating bulk above the skyline.

From the beginning of the flat at the mouth of the gulch were wagons, tents, dirt-roofed cabins, mounds of old clothes and hats and bottles, two inches of dust or as much mud, stumps, broken rifle boxes, long toms and rockers in action, workers and drones.

When Goss glanced below it was to wonder why men should lame their backs with manual labor, and why his race should always index its civilization by erecting eyesores in the shape of heaps of discarded clothing and gear. Goss should have been fighting either in the Confederate or the Federal Army; or he should have been working in the busy groups below. He had spent two busy years in the various camps and had done no constructive labor. If he had had periods of impoverishment, there had been nothing to indicate it. Always well-groomed and neatly attired, he had drifted from camp to camp, taking toll at various gambling tables, and always unhurried and unafraid. He was no romantic stoic, although his thin, dark face usually was immobile as a mask. He was simply a young fellow who believed he could live by his wits and that cards were a legitimate vocation. What had precipitated him into this belief was his discovery, during a sojourn in Salt Lake City in 1859, that he could skin Brigham Young at euchre.

He smiled whimsically as up the slope floated the shrill voice of a woman singing as she weaved up and down over a tub:

> "There shall labor win its way,
> Toiling, thriving, day by day,
> Strong in heart and hope let's go
> Through the prairies—westward ho!"

His quick eye caught a dejected figure slowly ascending the slope toward his terrace, and he muttered:

"There's one of the toilers. Never could pay that lady for doing his washing."

He drew his feet beneath him, ready to move higher as he wished to be alone. He had his fill of humanity at the smoky tables each night. He recognized the intruder as a young man of about his own age, known as the "Singing Pilgrim."

Possibly none in the gulch besides Goss knew the fellow was christened Frank Ellis. The gambler felt immeasurably older than the Singing Pilgrim, and of a certainty the latter would cut a sorry figure playing euchre with Brigham Young. From what Goss had observed, he tagged Ellis as one of those unfortunate mortals predestined to be a failure. Ellis was just arriving at the same conclusion and was climbing the slope to fight his misery undisturbed.

From the pines far up the slope came a man of the Indian nation, who hunted for the gold camps and who had spent the season supplying meat to Oro City, Slabtown and Malta, as sections of the five miles of straggling habitations in California Gulch were designated. The gambler lazily watched the Indian, and muttered—

"The 'Rabbit' is another kind of a toiler."

That he approved of the Rabbit was evidenced by his continuing to gaze at the hunter. The fellow wore buckskin like a mountain man and had a red handkerchief tied over his head like a turban.

Ellis saw neither the gambler nor the hunter as he threw himself on the ground and drew up his knees to support his chin while he entered on the gloomy task of reviewing the season and of tasting every bitterness of disappointment and disillusionment.

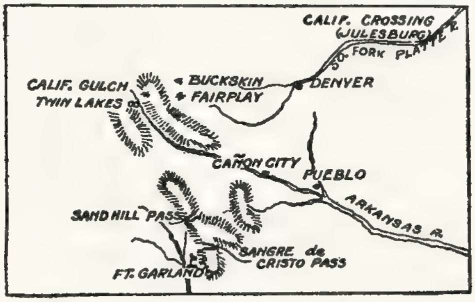
He could not understand how he had blindly drifted through the months, nor why the awakening had not been earlier. There were the optimistic letters written home in the spring. His brown face grew hot with shame and fear as he tried to recall just what he had written. He knew there was much of bombastic assurance; for it was his weakness to take much for granted. At the outset he had been thrilled by the success of his neighbors and had believed he was about to enjoy the same sort of luck. Now he was afraid he had convinced his sister that the goal had been reached.

Down below, the woman washing coarse flannels repeated her shrill invitation to all who would thrive by honest toil. Ellis groaned. He had toiled without prospering. He had been living on extravagant hopes, and no man could live by hope alone in California Gulch in 1862.

He discovered the Indian and nodded gloomily. Then he returned to the dismal inventory of his failures. Had the Rabbit been a white man Ellis would have moved on, finding his privacy disturbed. Yet this red man wrote and spoke better English than many of the citizens in Oro and came of an excellent family in the Indian Nation. To Ellis he was only a wandering red hunter and could not intrude any more than the timid animal after which he was called.

To the young man's credit he did not attempt to defend his failure by thinking of men who, as ignorant as he of placer mining, had struck it rich. Yet indubitably chance did play an important part in the success or failure of the Pike's Peakers. Else, how could John H. Gregory, the Georgia man reputed to be lazy, make almost direct to his great discovery above Golden City. Or George Jackson succeed on Chicago Creek? Or Green Russell find the gulch now bearing his name? Or S. S. Slater and his companions happen upon the wealth of California Gulch? Or C. F. Wilson find color in Frying Pan Gulch at the base of Mount Massive?

These prospectors and scores of others who succeeded had no maps to go by. The roof of the continent was unmapped. Like so many blind men they had groped their way into an unknown country and had stumbled upon riches. But Ellis did not dwell on these. One thought was in his mind—a man should not trust to luck who has an only sister, dependent on his efforts, waiting for him back east.



The hunter, skilled at reading signs, had watched the forlorn profile keenly. Now he spoke, saying:

"The singing man sings no more at his work. Has some shaman unrolled a blue path for his feet?"

"Most likely, Rabbit. I feel blue enough. I'm busted. I was fool enough to think the season would last forever, each day was so long and so filled with chances."

The hunter stared toward the east and muttered:

"The days pass like running antelopes. Even a shaman can not make the days slow down to a walk."

"They pass quickly to you as you have no responsibility," moodily reminded Ellis. "One day is as good as another to you."

"Each day is the work of a wonderful magician," slowly corrected the Indian. "I was brought up to live like a white man. I have read his books. Now the days run so swiftly I think of the old things my people believed in when they lived beyond the Mississippi."

Ellis' curiosity was pricked despite his gloomy frame of mind.

"I can't make out what you're driving at, Rabbit. You've never met with any hard luck. You make more selling meat to the miners than many of them make washing dirt."

"What a man brings on himself is not hard luck. On June first next year I must be back with my people to be shot to death."

"Good ——! What are you talking?"

"It is true. I killed a man while drunk. He was drunk. We quarreled. My people tried me and gave me a year to live. So each day while shooting game for a white camp I tell myself, 'Henry Went, you will never see a day like this. You will never see the first day of August again.'"

Forgetful of self Ellis stared at him in amazement and finally cried:

"But that's the rankest foolishness! You're here. You're not back in the Indian Nation. There's no one to find you and make you go back."

The hunter rose and quietly said:

"You speak as a white man. I promised to return by June first."

And he went down the slope with the lithe, gliding step of the hunter. Ellis stared after him, incredulous, until he disappeared from sight below the edge of the terrace.

The persistent vocalist was now offering:

"Bright fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand dressed in living green."

This suggested hopes deferred, but an abiding faith that all would be made right in another life. Such resignation did not appeal to Ellis. He must make good at once. His sister expected it of him. Even now she was thinking him to be a man of importance. There came the panicky fear that the remainder of the season would gallop by like running antelopes.

Straggling to the valley of the Arkansas were five or six miles of wagons, tents, and huts; and early in 1860 there had not been a single habitation. Where only a roaming Ute had visited the ravine there was now a population of several thousand.

It was this knowledge of how incredibly swift the changes had come that suggested to Ellis the fantastic notion that the gulch might be emptied and restored to primal conditions before he could rearrange his thoughts. His worry already was crowding from his mind the tragedy of Henry Went, the educated Indian called Rabbit.

"Brothers, sisters, ye who toil,
Ply the loom, or till the soil,
From o' crowded cities come,
Seek with me a forest home."

So wailed the woman at her washing.

Ellis groaned and muttered fiercely:

"Well, —— it! Haven't I toiled? Done everything but strike off alone somewhere?"

But having entered his defense, he proceeded to condemn himself for not having plunged into the unknown alone. He endeavored to bolster up his courage to the point of imitating Gregory and Russell. The drawback was he was gregarious. Then there were the Indians. True, the Utes were hostile in spots only.

The plains Indian had sneaked in and had killed their chief Benito, whose successor, Ouray, had just returned from Washington where he had been profoundly impressed by McClellan's army of two hundred and fifty thousand. Yet should the Utes catch a white man alone, there was no saying what they might do. Then again, if he could not make a strike in the richest gold camp in Colorado, what chance would he stand in hunting at random?

"WORKING in cap, Pilgrim?" [*] drawled Goss behind him.

Ellis started violently, then recognized the speaker and bitterly replied—

"I've been working in cap, Goss, ever since I came out here."

"Can't find any nuggets?"

"Harder'n saving scale and flour gold in an ordinary sluicebox."

"Well, there's lots of men down there making better than a living who never stick a pick in dirt," encouraged the gambler.

"I should have found some such work early in the season. Now every one will soon be going down to Denver or Cañon City. Of course I couldn't see ahead how the season would pan out."

"No one can stand off a streak of bad luck," gravely agreed Goss. "I know. Yet you ought to get a bread-and-Gosgen-butter job and save enough to stake you in town till you can locate a regular job. No place where luck's more cranky than in the camps."

"Guess I know that," sighed Ellis. "I know two men who didn't know the first thing about placer mining, who took out sixty thousand dollars down there in less'n three months. Sixty thousand! Good land! Think of it!"

"It's all in a man's luck," agreed Goss. "I laughed my head nearly off when an old German drifted into Iowa gulch with only some burlap bags in his outfit. Simple as a child. Said he fetched them to put his gold in. We had lots of fun with him. But if he didn't blunder onto a rich spot inside the first three days. Took it as a matter of course. Called some of the boys over and asked, 'Iss it golt?' He didn't fill all his bags but he scooped out enough to make the rest of his life easy. Almost before we knew it he was out of the gulch to catch the Overland to the River.[*] Funniest of all, he'll never realize his luck was unusual."

"I know," sorrowfully remarked Ellis. "First place I lighted on in the spring I quit as being no good. Two Mexicans then tried it and took out three thousand dollars. If I'd stuck just two days longer! Oh, what's the use!"

"Exactly. Life's too short to spend time wishing you'd drawn different. If you hold up a kicker you'll wish you'd drawn down to the full strength of your hand. So life seems to go. But you're all right. No need to go dry or hungry if you'll work. Foolish to waste time on regretting."

"Life is short," mumbled Ellis. "The Indian hunter was just telling me he will go back to his people next summer to be killed."

"So I understand," carelessly replied Goss. "It all depends on how you look at things. I wouldn't go back. But I have met Indians from Indian Territory up in Missouri under death penalties, who were going back for the day set, so I wasn't surprised about Rabbit."

"Good Heavens! To deliberately go back to be killed! I can't understand it."

"Certainly he'll go back. He would disgrace his folks if he didn't. Some white men aren't so sensitive about the family honor."

And Goss' laugh held no mirth.

"Well, the Rabbit is worse off than I am. I still have life."

"Rabbit has his red sense of honor. It prevents his living beyond execution day," tersely summed up the gambler.

Ellis rose to his feet and confessed:

"I'm not thinking of myself. I have a little sister back home. Little older'n me. Our folks are dead. We raised money on the place to outfit me for the mines. We both believed that I was to pick up a fortune out here. That's what hurts."

"Yes, of course. Have a cigar."

Ellis shook his head, and exclaimed:

"If it hadn't been for the Rabbit there's been times I'd have gone hungry. I let him give me deer meat."

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[*] "Cap," the narrowing of a paying vein, came to be synonymous in Colorado for "obstacle." "Pilgrim" first used by Mormons in migration to Utah. Later used to designate a tenderfoot or greenhorn. West bound wagon-trains were called Pilgrim trains.

[*] In Colorado at the time of this story "the River" always meant the Missouri.

"You accepted help from a very brave man. Better smoke."

Ellis again refused and curtly explained:

"Must be going. No more time for loafing."

And he plunged down the slope without waiting for the gambler's company, still brooding over the bitterest "what might have been" in his whole catalogue of miseries. If he had only worked his first claim two days longer!

He found the long straggling street in a furore of excitement aroused by the report of two ounce diggings over the range and near Buckskin Joe.* He refused to be interested. He was working into a frame of mind that no wild stampede could change and he did not wish to invite further disappointments. Let them all run away to Buckskin Joe, or to a score of other lures, but he was through with lifting rocks and digging, with only a lame back and heartaches for a reward. Goss' talk was good. He would accumulate a grub stake and go to Denver or some other town, and write his sister that they must wait until another season for him to return.

Several wagons were advertised to be saloons and hotels. Guests of the latter ate their meals from tables of rough boards in the open, or under a tent. Families were living in wagons; and they ate under them and there stacked their few dishes and cooking utensils.

There were many log cabins, with roofs of dirt. With one to two thunder showers a day these leaked badly. One citizen complained it rained inside for a day after it stopped raining outside. As Ellis walked along he recalled his first meal in the gulch when, filled with optimism and able to pay his way in eastern money, he gave his order to an uncouth waiter, who wore a revolver and bowie knife at his belt. He could still hear the raucous voice of the wild looking fellow bawling—

"Where's the short-haired son of a gun who hankered for beefsteak 'n eggs 'n coffee?"

And he never would forget how a questionable dish was violently slammed down before him, accompanied by the information—

"You'll be —— glad to git outside of that, son. It's hash."

And behold! There was the erstwhile waiter, ferocious looking as ever, still armed with hand gun and knife. Only now he was taking his ease between two covered wagons that served as sleeping quarters, and on which was painted:

GRATE WEST HOTELL.
ALL ESTERN FIXINS.
GEO. SKILLINGS, BOSS.

Ellis' clothes were dilapidated and his hair was long and ragged; his thin beard was unsuccessfully striving to cover his melancholy face. In sudden desperation he advanced and asked—

"Want any help, Mr. Skillings?"

The proprietor slowly turned his head and coldly replied, "Do I 'pear to need any help in leaning ag'in this wagon wheel?"

"I'm busted. I need work."

"Board'n two dollars a day working on the tables," growled Skillings. "Start in now. Where's your gun if folks act rough?"

"In my shack. I'll get it."

"—— of a place to leave a gun. Oughter leave it on Pike's Peak. Git the cook's gun. Tell him I said so. Git to work. Two thousand hungry men'll be along here soon. That —— Boston Hotel is gitting too many of them."

Ellis found the cook, a one-eyed man of villainous countenance but of a timid nature, and delivered the proprietor's message. With a sigh of relief the cook handed over a Colt dragoon model revolver, weighing a little over four pounds and too heavy for a man to carry in his belt. They were powerful enough to do deadly work at very long range, or send a bullet through a buffalo. The cook apologized, "Wish it was smaller. Takes a big man to carry one of 'em. She's loaded with forty-five grains and is bound to jump. Don't shoot it 'less you're obleeged to."

Ellis, slim of build, weighed the gun thoughtfully, then said—

"I'll leave it here where it'll be handy if I need it."

Then he hurried to the tables.

Miners, traders and employees, and the constantly drifting population were already hunting supper places. Groups were turning into the Great West, but nothing like the number patronizing the Boston which boasted of a tent over the tables.

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* Early camp named after Buckskin Joe, an old mountain man.

AS ELLIS began taking orders he almost felt he had been transformed into Skillings, the waiter. But Skillings was not to be sneered at. He had gotten ahead. He had made money without breaking his back over a rocker. He was almost an example for the ambitious to follow.

Ellis had fitted in nowhere when he came down the slope;.now he was worth two dollars a day and his board. Ill luck had buffeted him so long and persistently that even this meager footing restored something of his self-respect, and more of his hopefulness.

But what uplifted his spirit most must have been the realization that he was finished with grubbing for the gold that never was there. After a few orders had made him feel used to his work he was surprised to find himself singing. It was a sentimental song, "My Sweetheart When a Boy."

Skillings was greatly annoyed. A singing waiter was unheard of. He could understand the value of oaths, but singing! Striding among the tables he yelled—

"Stop that —— racket!"

Ellis, much embarrassed, instantly complied. But Charley Dodge, a Wisconsin fugitive with twenty-five hundred dollars on his head, reached out a hand and roughly seized Skillings by the arm and inquired:

"Where do you think you're going? What do you think you're going to do?"

Greatly flustered Skillings meekly explained:

"I was allowing to stop that hooting so's you boys can eat in peace."

"Get back to your wagons. When we don't like singing we'll say so. Scoot!"

Ellis had no wish to sing, but Dodge nodded for him to resume. Another man loudly announced:

"We've got the Singing Pilgrim rassling hash. Hit up a tune, younker!"

This and other forcibly expressed encouragements and commands left the new waiter no choice. Above the rattle of the dishes rose his mellow voice, continuing the song:

"Still on my heart the beams remain
In gay, unclouded joy,
When I remember her again,
My sweetheart when a boy."

Cheers and vociferous demands for more rewarded him. It was his first achievement since entering the gulch, and success is relative. The rough applause thrilled him. What had been a nickname became a title. He had ceased being a cipher and was threatening to become a personage. For the first time the distinction of being the Singing Pilgrim pleased him.

Skillings, sulking at the wagons, was surprised to behold groups of men turning back to his tables after hearing the song and the cheering. His tangled beard stirred as he grinned, elated at winning patronage from the Boston Hotel. But one can not sing while taking a hurricane of orders. Ellis ran from tables to kitchen with empty dishes, and back again with food. Dodge halted him and growled, "Sing, —— it!"

"We're short of help."

"What's that to you, or us? Hit up a tune."

Skillings, having noticed trade diminished when the singing ceased, appeared on the scene as Dodge was speaking, and with an attempt at a gentle voice inquired:

"What's the matter, friend? Lost your voice? Bust loose ag'in."

Without looking at the proprietor Dodge ordered Ellis.

"Tell that fool to go to ——. Then give us another song."

Skillings hurriedly retreated to the wagons. Ellis sang "The Gypsy Band," "Lorena" and several southern melodies. While thus engaged he made only a pretense of waiting on the table. At the close of the meal a messenger from the Boston Hotel sidled up to him and whispered an offer of four dollars a day and board. While he was debating whether to accept the offer or request a like wage from Skillings, a hand rested on his arm.

It was Nathan Goss, his clean-shaven face wearing an amused smile.

"Working out of cap, eh?" greeted the gambler. "Struck a claim that hasn't been hogged out, eh?"

His black eyes, usually half closed and suspicious, twinkled humorously as he reminded:

"Up the slope you didn't seem to be in a mood for singing. I heard the last song. You've got a fine voice. It's as soothing as four aces. Met Whimsey, the dancehall girl, above the Boston. She was weeping. When I asked her what the matter was, she said, 'I've been listening to that —— Pilgrim.' The same being a strong compliment, young man."

Ellis could never find anything wearisome in the perfume of praise. With a modesty he did not feel he explained the offer just received. Goss' eyes snapped and he advised curtly:

"Press your luck. Tell that long-haired hellion it's a five a day or you quit."

He passed on, his eyes half-closed and his handsome countenance resuming its habitual expression of cold indifference, his feet carefully picking a path to save the polish of his patent-leather boots. Ellis went to the wagons and with a show of boldness that was largely vocal presented his demand to Skillings.

He was almost nonplused by the proprietor's prompt reply:

"So long as you pull trade, all right. Five a day it is. But I'll need more help if you spend your time hooting. Hustle round tonight and pick up two or three more waiters."

Five-dollar diggings were not to be scoffed at when so many men were earning no better than their keep. The gambler was right; a nickname was panning out rich color. He told himself—

"I'm working out of cap."

After he had eaten his supper with the one-eyed cook, Rabbit, the Indian hunter glided up to the fire.

"I heard your singing," he explained. "It made me think of what my people call the 'old things'; old times, old stories, old games I played when a boy. It made me remember when I asked the Beaver to send me a new tooth. That was a very long time ago. When a man gets to the end of a trail he can look only one way—backward."

"But you're not at the end of the trail," Ellis objected. "There is nothing to make you go back home next summer."

"There is everything. My people never forgave my killing a man while I was drunk. My white name, nor my Indian name, would never be spoken if I did not go back."

He glided among the huts and wagons and was gone up the slope before Ellis could reply.

But Ellis could not give much thought to the incomprehensible Indian. He must find waiters. In two hours of hunting he found only one prospect, a very ragged, hairy man who confessed to destitution.

"I'm flat busted," frankly admitted this man. "And I'm a newcomer to this camp. But I'm one of 'riginal Peakers outside this gulch. And I didn't come here to find work. I've got something bigger'n all Californy Gulch can shell out. Come to ask Wolfe Londoner to grub-stake me; but it seems he's over the ridge. Must have passed him."

"I know him. Runs a store here."

"I know him through and through," jealously added the stranger. "Knew him when he run a store for Hanuer and Dold in Cañon City. He opened one here for them two years ago. Bought it out for himself. I don't think any man in this gulch knows him better'n I do. More'n once he'd been to my little ranch below Cañon City."

"I hope he helps you. He's a good man to go to," said Ellis, "so I won't say I'm sorry you're not interested in my offer."

"But I be interested till Londoner gits back, and then, maybe. Summer's about hogged out and I ain't got my outfit. Have to wait another season before I can do any real work. So I'll shove hash for a while."

"That's fine. Come along and meet Skillings, the boss," urged Ellis.

"Skillings? Met a feller last season by that name. Looks like a murderer. If this feller is any relation to him I don't want the job."

"His money's good. None of us work for love. Come have a look at him anyway," said Ellis.

GRUMBLING over the bad luck that was reducing him to menial labor, the ragged man accompanied Ellis to the Great West Hotel. Skillings was smoking at the end of the first wagon. Ellis had barely commenced talking before his employer removed his pipe to viciously demand:

"Where'n —— did you dig up that wreck? 'Ancient Days' waiting on the tables! Well, I'll be double——!"

"You long-faced hoss thief! I'd eat boots before I'd work for you," snarled he of the quaint nickname.

And from somewhere in his rags he drew the longest knife Ellis had ever seen.

Skillings amazed Ellis by showing fear, and by attempting to placate.

"Now, Ancient. Now, now. Just a rough bit of fun, you know."

His voice was nervous and his eyes were focused on the knife. "Just kinder put up that tickler. My jokes may be rough but there's only a warm heart back of 'em. I was s'prized that a man with your secret would be wanting to throw hash."

"I'm s'prized, too," was the bitter reply. "But till I git an outfit I'm s'posed to eat."

"That's true as the Big Book," warmly agreed Skillings. Then he gently prompted—

"The lost Doyle mine, of course?"

"Yes, sirree! The lost Doyle mine," cried Ancient Days, his eyes lighting. "And I'll nail it. Jim Doyle was an old mountain man, and an honest one. And he said he found it. And I'll nail it."

"But he's dead in Santa Fe," reminded Skillings. "Better go ahead and wait on the tables."

"Course he's dead, or I wouldn't be looking for his mine. But he took ore to Santa Fe that assayed out one-half pure silver. He knocked it off a cropping some four feet wide on a little ridge that runs down to a creek somewhere near the south base of Wet Mountains."

Skillings had heard much about Doyle's lost mine, but was not the type to seek among the Ute-infested mountains. Ancient Days, so called because he had been in the country prior to the Cherry Creek discoveries, might find it. Skillings had arrived at a decision before the prospector finished speaking. He cordially insisted:

"Ancient, you feed here long as you want to and help on the tables——"

"I wouldn't stay any longer'n it takes to talk with Wolfe Londoner and git him to grub-stake me," indignantly broke in Ancient.

"Have it any way you please. If you don't want to work on the tables you can help the cook. Grub and two dollars a day. That's the kind of a hossfly I be when it comes to helping men who will make Colorado a mighty big country. But I'm thinking I'm just as good a man as Wolfe Londoner when it comes to outfitting a feller of your sort. Of course every one's after gold, and silver don't seem to cut much of a figger. But silver ain't to be sneezed at."

Ancient, somewhat mollified, combed his figgers through his beard and decided.

"I'll help with the cooking for a bit. I ain't ready to make bargains for an outfit till after I've talked with Londoner."

Ellis had to fight to extinguish the blaze of interest kindled by the veteran prospector's words. He kept telling himself he was through with gold hunting, and yet a lost mine was most alluring. Time might come when he would realize it was one of the oldest baits dangled before adventurous man since the first strike was made in the old land of Havilah. Skillings broke in on his thoughts by abruptly reminding:

"Gitting late. No waiters yet. You can hire as many as three. I'll give you two dollars a week extry for every man that works that long."

Ellis returned to the hunt. He interviewed several men who were out of work and practically penniless, but nothing short of nuggets would tempt them to labor. He wasted no time on the camp riff-raff, men who would put in long hours in saloons because of the free liquor.

He finally suspended his search on finding himself before Charley Dodge's three-card monte table. Two six-shooters reposed on the rough boards. The back and sides of the booth were of stout planks, bullet proof. The top was of canvas. Two lanterns illuminated the game. Dodge, one of the cleverest monte dealers in the mountains, was inviting:

"I make it easy, gentlemen. A red ace and two black cards. Follow the ace closely as I shuffle the cards. Only three cards, and the red ace takes the money. I throw them face down. Is that the ace? Or this? Or this? Pick the ace and you win. If you pick a black card you lose. It's my regular trade, gentlemen. It's as honest as speculating in gulch claims and twice as sensible. For there is gold on this table for the taking, and many claims are worthless. Pick the ace and you win. I bet my quickness of hand against your quickness of eye. There they are. And there's no chance for a crooked play. Who'll pick the ace for twenty or a hundred?"

A young man, a newcomer by the cut of his clothes and short cropped hair, stepped forward and wagered twenty dollars and confidently picked up the deuce of spades. Dodge scooped up the money and cards, and reminded:

"I have two chances to your one if you go it blind, but it takes the turn of only one card for a blind man to win. I'm beaten if your eyes see straight. The red ace wins you the money. It's the squarest game in the gulch. Here you, Singing Pilgrim, make me a bet of ten dollars."

And he nodded to Ellis as he gave the cards a final shuffle and slowly dropped them.

Dodge had interfered when Skillings was

about to act rough. Prompted by that recollection rather than by any desire to gamble, also because he had observed the corner of the ace was slightly bent, Ellis fished out his money, six dollars, and placed five on the board.

"Pick your card!" snapped Dodge.

Ellis turned up the ace and pocketed his money. Dodge shuffled the cards and announced:

"No more stakes under ten dollars. The young man has a sharp eye. He had me beat the minute I threw the cards. If he'd been well outfitted he could have won a hundred. The red ace wins for you. Who feels lucky for twenty, or fifty?"

The interest of the onlookers was rekindled by Ellis' success. One, who had observed the corner of the ace, eagerly pressed forward and bet fifty dollars, and was amazed to find he had selected the deuce of spades. The young man who had lost twenty turned a melancholy countenance to Ellis and whispered:

"That's what fooled me. Corner turned up. Thought I had a sure thing. Cleaned me out."

Ellis was rather pleased to hear this and quickly said:

"I'm looking for waiters to work at the Great West Hotel. Two dollars a day and board."

"My name's Hill. I'll take on until something better shows up."

Dodge monotonously repeated his invitation, but the betting was slow. Hill told Ellis—

"You're lucky, or quick of eye."

"Never lucky, but rather sharp of eye. I saw the corner of the ace was turned up. He must smooth out the corners after each cast. Probably turns a corner in holding them. If I'd had a hundred dollars I'd be that much ahead by now."

He fingered the ten dollars in his pocket. It would soon increase to a hundred if he wagered wisely.

"Idea is to watch the ace the last time it shows when he's shuffling it," he muttered to Hill. "Then if a corner is accidently bent, no matter how little, a man ought to pick it."

"You're both lucky and quick of eye. Give it another try."

Ellis watched the cards closely! There was no mistaking the bent corner of the ace. Dodge had smoothed it out but it was showing again. The cards fluttered down and Dodge's hand was hovering to scoop them up when Ellis brought a scowl to the dealer's face by tossing his money on the board, announcing—

"I bet ten."

Dodge was irritated, but he was a gambler and inviting patronage, therefore—fair game. Ellis suppressed a smile and made haste to select a card, the ten of spades.

The spectators laughed. One cried:

"Got the grave digger, sonny. Can't always tell, can you?"

Ellis' self-respect decreased to the vanishing point. It was some minutes before he cared to fall back beside Hill. When he did so he was further disheartened on being told:

"I've changed my mind about waiting on a table. This man offers work in Buckskin Joe. I'm leaving with him in the morning."

Ellis glanced at the stranger, some ten years his senior, and resented his intrusion. The latter explained:

"I need two likely men in my store at Buckskin. That seems to be the coming town. My name's Tabor."

"Thanks. But I'll go on here till the season closes," Ellis refused.

Tabor smilingly advised:

"Better keep away from three-card monte. You can't win."

"But I did win once," sharply informed Ellis.

"That's because he let you win to encourage the betting. I shouldn't wonder if you saw the corner of the ace was turned up. Then again it's the corner of another card when you think it's the ace. I'm crossing the range to Buckskin early in the morning, Hill. If you're busted you'd better come with me. Londoner's clerk will give us a shake-down in the store."

AS the two walked away Ellis wished he had accepted the offer. Work in a store appealed to him as being more substantial employment than feeding people. He had read Skillings' nature quite correctly and knew he would always dislike him. The man was a bully. Ellis glanced toward Londoner's store. Only his pride restrained him from running after Tabor and accepting the job.

While he was trying to oust pride a hand clapped down on his shoulder and a low voice was saying:

"What, ho, the young songster! This very late night air may be bad for your voice. Planning to win new laurels tomorrow?"

"I've won laurels as a fool, Goss. Just lost ten dollars on that game because I thought I was smart."

Dodge was insisting:

"The squarest game in the camp, gentlemen. It isn't even a gambling game. You either see the red ace, or don't. If you want to lose with never a look-in, go and stub up against the cardsharps."

Goss' half-veiled gaze wandered to the table and he murmured:

"It isn't exactly professional, maybe. Wolf shouldn't bite wolf; but that fellow's a skunk. You stand back, Pilgrim, and let's see if I can't make that ten return."

Dodge discovered him and guessed his purpose before he got within a dozen feet of the table. The gambler's set features relaxed in a pleasant smile as he passed through the foremost line. Dodge ceased his patter and practised throwing the cards with his left hand. The gambler stood with his arms folded and bantered:

"I'll take ten dollars not to play. I never bet less than a hundred."

"Goss, that isn't good talk," murmured Dodge as he picked up and threw down the cards.

Goss shifted his position and dropped his hands, his right sinking into the pocket of his sack coat.

"What's wrong with my talk?" he inquired.

"It isn't a good talk. It's a hold-up. When you want to hold me up you want to come with gun pointing."

The monte-dealer rested both hands on the table, the right covering the butt of a six-shooter.

"Dodge, it is pointing." Goss moved the hand in his coat pocket. "Do you deal them for me or pay ten for me not to play?"

The spectators realized there was bad blood between the two, and gave ground and began heckling.

"Dog eat dog!" cried an anonymous voice.

"When thieves fall out," came from the rim of the circle.

"One's afraid and t'other dassent."

This brought a roar of laughter.

Goss did not appear to hear the badinage. Dodge grew furious. He loudly cried—

"I'll deal them, —— you! But are you betting talk or money?"

Goss' left hand fished from his pocket ten gold pieces, issued by the private mint of Gruber and Clark in Denver, and stacked them on the board. His right hand remained buried in his pocket.

"Don't turn up any corners, Dodge," he warned. "Just show me the ace is on the bottom, then throw them as slick as you can."

Dodge stared down at the gambler, his eyes wide and showing much white. He observed the right-hand pocket where something hard was bulging out the cloth as the muzzle of a pocket pistol would do. Straightening, he picked up the cards and shuffled them slowly, taking ostentatious care in smoothing out the corners. To the interested spectators he said—

"This man knows just how I do it and he's going to take away all my money."

This brought a laugh.

He held up the cards so all could see the red ace was on the bottom, then dealt them with marvelous adroitness. Ellis could not believe the human gaze could follow the brief flight of the bottom card. The three pieces of pasteboard had barely touched the table before Goss stretched forth his left-hand and picked up the red ace. The crowd jeered, indifferent to which should win the strange joust. Dodge coolly counted out gold pieces and murmured—

"Do you care to try again?"

He held up the cards with the ace on the bottom.

Ellis believed Goss had had enough, for he started to back away even while the dealer was speaking. Then his face hardened and he dumped two hundred dollars on the board. The money was hardly placed before the cards were dealt. For half a minute Goss stared fixedly at the dealer. The crowd began jeering him. Dodge smiled slightly and asked—

"Trying to make sure?"

"Dodge, I've made sure. Shall I pick up the stakes, or will you double it with me betting that none of the three cards is the red ace?"

"What the —— do you mean?" hoarsely whispered Dodge, resting his hands on the table and leaning slightly forward.

"That you have the ace palmed in your left-hand. You dropped it there after showing us it was on the bottom. The extra card you palmed in your right when counting out the gold. You've thrown three cards.

None is the ace. Four hundred I'm right."

"Pick up the cards! Pick up the cards! Show the crooked —— up!" the onlookers shouted, their sympathy now swerving to the gambler.

For if the monte man could play such tricks, then each loser would always believe he had been fleeced in that fashion.

Dodge swiftly swept up the cards and announced—

"The game is closed."

He pocketed his two guns and passed around the end of the small table and belligerently made his way through the crowd. Men fell back and gave him room for there was murder in his wide eyes.

Goss watched him until he saw him pass through the shaft of light cast from a drinking saloon. Then he relaxed and scooped in the gold and hastily withdrew into the shadows. When Ellis joined him he slipped a ten-dollar gold piece into his hand, and his voice was harsh as he remarked:

"There's your money back. I'm not doing this sort of a thing as a business. That ten dollars will cost a shooting sometime."

"I can't take it."

"Shut up! Think I'm going to risk a bullet for ten dollars and then have you refuse it?"

"You've got the quickest eye in the world!" softly cried Ellis.

"Like —— I have. No man on earth can do more than guess when Charley Dodge throws the cards to win. I had one chance out of three and went it blind. I happened to win. But I did catch the flutter of something in his left hand when he palmed the ace. Hope I haven't made trouble for you. He's bad. Better go to bed. I must get a gun."

"But you have one?"

Goss laughed shortly.

"Dodge will be double mad if he ever finds out how I bluffed him. No, my sweet singer, for once I wasn't outfitted. Had him covered with the end of my finger. But this affair will be worse before it's better. His game may be spoiled in this camp. Don't wander around late at night."

The possibility of Dodge feeling enmity toward him decided Ellis to go with Tabor to Buckskin. He hurried to Londoner's store only to learn from Tabor that he was five minutes too late, a second man already being hired. On leaving the store, his anxious gaze on watch for Dodge, he ran upon Charley Arnold, a man he had known back east. Like himself Arnold had had hard luck that season. With his gaze wandering about to guard against Dodge's coming he hurriedly made his offer.

"I'm thirty-eight years old," said Arnold. "Came out here to find gold. If I'm to work for day wages I can do better in Massachusetts, considering the cost of living. I'm going down to Frying Pan Gulch. I'm penniless, and waiting on tables is all right. But if I take a job like that it means I've quit; that I'm finished. No. Gold or nothing."

This brief interview left Ellis much depressed. He had quit. He was something that was finished. He pictured Arnold, lucky at last and coming to his table to be served. As he was passing through the light from a store window he was greatly startled to find his path blocked by Charley Dodge. The man's eyes were vicious.

"A few words with you, you young pup," he began. "What kind of a game did you think you was playing by sending Nate Goss to my table tonight?"

"I didn't send him. He happened to meet me. I told him I'd lost ten dollars. If I'd known he would try to get it back I'd kept my mouth shut."

He was immensely relieved when Dodge assured:

"I'm not carrying a fight to cubs. You didn't ought to come crowding in after I'd let you win once."

"But I didn't understand."

"If you stay out here a lifetime you'll be as green as the first Peaker," growled Dodge. "Probably Nate Goss thinks he's stopped my game. He ain't. I've circulated word through my friends that it was a game between me and a slick gambler. In a game of that kind anything is allowed. But the real game between him and me—well, we won't talk about that. I'm opening up again tomorrow night. We can fix it so you can make a bit from my table. You be there every evening and bet ten when I push my hat. Ace'll have the corner bent a bit. After the game closes you'll hand back what you've won. I'll pay five dollars a night."

"But I couldn't do that!"

"Too high and finicky, eh? Don't want to help greenhorns to lose. But you're quick enough to help Charley Dodge to lose when you reckon you're betting on a sure thing.

Goss cost me quite a lot of money tonight; but I'm going to get it all back."

"I'm through betting."

"All right. Go to —— and wait on tables," directed Dodge, swinging away.

CHAPTER II

THE KILLING

WHEN Ellis turned out next morning he was pleased to have Ancient Days inform him:

"I've landed a man to work on the tables. Got him last night while you was prowling round town. He ain't much to look at but he means well. He's a bit queer but not enough to hurt. Name, Joe Hasty. But we call him 'Big Bones' along of his funny notions about rampageous animals living in the mountains. His mind is streaked, like bacon, with sense and foolish notions. If he's took with a queer spell down in the valley you couldn't hire him to come up here. But the spell dropped on him while he was here and he don't dare budge from this gulch, even to do a little prospecting."

Ellis was rather dubious about the new man. Ancient, watching him sharply, seemed to read his thoughts and hastily assured him:

"You can hang your hat on him every time. He knows enough to sling hash. Any man can do that who knows enough to throw a boot at a blind man. What do you care if he believes there's twenty-foot lizards and such critters in these hills? He'll be a mighty good man for you so long as the spell lasts."

"We'll try him," decided Ellis. "That is, if Skillings is willing. And it's good of you, Ancient, to get him. If he takes hold, the two dollars a week bonus that Skillings was to pay me will go to you."

"Bonus ——! Or whatever it is. I'm prime selfish in keeping Big Bones anchored here. Never dreamed he was in the diggings till he mooned along last night. By starts and fits his head's been queer ever since he went with the John Baker party to look at the San Juan country in 1860. Charley Hall, who runs the salt works, twenty miles from Fairplay, had his hair turned white by that trip. Many of the party was killed by hunger, cold and Injuns when they split into small bands and tried to make the Arkansas without going round by the way of New Mexico. My friend started on the trip as Joe Hasty. He come back as Big Bones. Ate his buckskin pants, moccasins and leather belt. Ate himself right out of his clothes. Saved his hide but damaged his wits.

"But we never knew how notional he was till we see the Big Bones in the park six miles north of Cañon City. Lord, but he was scared! At first we thought he was fooling. Then we see he really believed that some of those old twenty-foot fossils was still living in the mountains. Then the spell passed away and he didn't remember anything about it. Got mad as sin if we spoke of it. So he must have been Joe Hasty when he come up here. Now his mind has turned over again, and he's Big Bones and scared out of his boots."

"He may do as a waiter, but how will he be of any help to you?" puzzled Ellis.

"If I can keep him here till he's Joe Hasty again we'll go prospecting together. He's a rip-snorter at finding color. Here's just one thing he told when he was hisself——"

And Ancient glanced sharply about to make sure none was within hearing. Skillings at the first wagon was completing his toilet by ruffling his long hair. Ancient hoarsely whispered:

"He seen diamonds in the San Juan country. Hardest stretch of earth in North America to git into, but he was there and seen diamonds."

"I don't believe it," Ellis bluntly said.

"Only those who believe things usually find them. Collier, of Central City was there the same season, and he says the greatest diamond diggings in the world are in the San Juan country along the Rio Animas.*

Ellis smiled. Ancient Days angrily exclaimed:

"All right. Know more'n your elders. I ain't after diamonds; but they're there in the Animas country! Big Bones knows of secret lodes. He'll be a jim-dandy in hunting for the Doyle mine."

"I'm positive of it; and I hope he'll be all right as a waiter. But every man I meet, almost, seems to know of some secret or lost mine; and not quite enough to find it. There's Walter Jones.† He was telling down to Londoner's store that the lead ore here assays from three to twenty-seven dollars a ton in silver, but that it'll cost eighty dollars to mill it."

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*According to Bancroft's History of Colorado, D. C. Collier offered to stake his reputation as a geologist and journalist to this effect.

†Walter H. Jones, pioneer from Illinois, afterwards part owner of Gaff Mining Co., Leadville, fulfilled this prediction.

"That's fool talk," jealously declared Ancient Days. "When folks want silver they'll have to come to me and my lost Doyle mine. All Jones knows is enough to be a gold buyer. You can't get silver out of lead ore. But here comes Big Bones. Remember, he knows more'n he looks."

The newcomer, short and square of build, his face concealed with bristling whiskers, was slowly picking his way across shallow chasms, abandoned and cursed because of the heavy red sand. He walked around reddish-black rocks, also a nuisance, and no more suspected the true wealth hidden in the sand and boulders than did the thousands and thousands of normal-minded men who had scoured and dug and made unlovely the treasure soil.

As Big Bones drew nearer the wagons Ellis observed his eyes were rolling uneasily and that he was continually turning his head from side to side as if fearing to see some of the prehistoric dinosaurs crawling down the slopes.

Ancient Days called to him sharply and focused his attention. It was apparent he was intelligent enough so long as he could be held to a theme. He told Ellis:

"It's a come-down for me to sling hash. But as long as we're cooped up here by them long, bony —— we must get along best we can. If I can have a bite to eat I'll be ready for work."

Ellis sent him with Ancient Days to get his breakfast while he interviewed the proprietor of the Great West Hotel. Skillings was sceptical.

"That feller's crazy. He won't be worth a —— waiting on tables. But you can try him."

Ellis, too, was doubtful; but as the men straggled in for their breakfast it quickly became obvious that Big Bones was the best man working on the tables. With automatic precision he brought in food and carried back empty dishes. He did not appear to hear the remarks concerning his dilapidated appearance. His gaze continued to wander uneasily to the slopes, his great fear riding him constantly, and yet something in his head faithfully registered each order.

Ellis further established his reputation as the Singing Pilgrim, and while he was singing, Bones refrained from watching the dead and broken timber along the first terrace. After breakfast was served he timidly told Ellis:

"I like your music. Sometimes when the wild animals ain't bothering us I'd like to sit down and hear lots of it. But those animals don't like it. One long —— scuttled back in the pines high up the hillside when you was letting out."

"Then you've seen animals here in this gulch?" gravely asked Ellis.

"Good land, yes! Where's your eyes? Early this morning they began coming out the timber on the slope back of the Boston Hotel. The one that went back when you was singing was a good thirty feet long, with a frill of bones standing up like a big fin along his back. Nothing smaller than a cannon ball could stop one of them if he took a notion to come down here. I figger they're 'fraid of these narrer ravines. 'Fraid they'll get wedged in between some of the heavy rocks. When you going to sing again?"

With the preceding evening's events heavy on his spirits Ellis did not feel like singing. Ancient Days whispered:

"He's mortal uneasy now he hasn't anything to do. Give him a tune."

And Ellis sang "My Old Kentucky Home." When he finished he had threescore for an audience. In the front rank was Rabbit, the hunter. As the auditors scattered to their work Rabbit approached and paused long enough to say:

"You have a shaman in your voice. I shall hunt better today for hearing it. It makes the heart heavy. It is about something that is all ended."

Skillings was quite amiable that morning. He visioned Big Bones faithfully waiting on tables until the season ended. Ancient Days would doubtless remain, and it would be peculiar if the latter's secret could not be made to materialize a profit after some fashion.

Nathan Goss broke his habit of late rising by appearing for the midday meal. He came early and took his time in surveying the tables. The seat he selected was at the end of a table where none could sit behind him. Ellis hurried to take his order before the tables filled up but the gambler was in no hurry! Ellis told him of his brief encounter with Dodge. Goss nodded his shapely head and remarked:

"Going to open up again, eh? About what I expected. Well, I'm no purifier. If fools want to be cheated that's their business. But Dodge and I must have an understanding. I'll begin to eat."

WHILE Ellis was after his order Charley Dodge appeared and walked briskly to his usual seat at the end of the table opposite Goss. Busy with exchanging nods and greetings, he did not observe Goss until he had seated himself. Then there was an instinctive movement of his hands, almost instantly checked; for Goss had been watching him and was now staring at him with wide-eyed gaze, his hands limply clasped on the table before him.

Big Bones came forward to take Dodge's order and, as Ellis returned with the gambler's dinner, he at once sensed the possibilities of a tragedy. Dodge's face was drawn and hard. He imitated Goss in keeping his hands clasped before him and, as he told the eccentric what he would have to eat, his eyes never left the lean, dark visage at the end of the table.

As he finished with the waiter his elbow knocked a knife to the ground. He made a move to pick it up. Goss leaned forward a bit. Dodge shrugged his shoulders and straightened. A Mexican boy recovered the knife.

Then Dodge called down the table—

"Have you a gun in front of you, Goss?"

Several men precipitately vacated their places. Heads were turned at other tables. Goss coldly replied:

"Do you see any gun? Why should a man keep a gun before him while eating his dinner? At a crooked card game where men may get angry, yes. But not necessary here."

Dodge stared, his lips slightly parted, and craned his neck. The boards in front of the gambler held no weapon. Men at the next table with their backs to the silent duel, quietly shifted their places so they might watch and be ready to duck to cover. Dodge surmised the gambler's early appearance at this particular table was an invitation to carry last night's argument to a definite conclusion.

He felt far more at ease after assuring himself that the gambler had no gun immediately at hand. For Dodge was ever willing to race any man to the first shot; and he possessed a certain advantage that the gambler did not suspect. The men at the other tables talked in low voices as they ate. They found the way to their mouths without wasting any glances on their victuals. The incident at the monte table was commonly known. Practically all the diners interpreted Goss' presence as had the monte-dealer. The gulch had grown too small for the two men. Keen eyes were watching to catch the first move in opening hostilities. Knives and forks felt around until they found mouths and food was blindly speared from the heavy plates.

Dodge began drumming his fingers idly on the table and ceased his scrutiny of the gambler to gaze carelessly about. Some of the spectators began to fear there would be no trouble and fell to eating more sensibly. But Goss watched his man. Even with his food before him he kept his right hand idle and only made a pretense of eating.

Dodge continued ignoring him and, as his order was served, fell to eating heartily. He ceased eating only when a man, who lived like the lilies, came along and shook hands with him.

Goss recognized the fellow as Bill Waggles, who came and went without any ostensible business. He had visited the gulch for a few days two weeks back. He appeared glad to meet Dodge. The latter talked in a low voice, laughing silently. If he made remarks about the gambler, Waggles did not indicate as much. He was standing with his back to Goss and never once turned to glance at him.

Waggles straightened for a moment as if about to leave, then bent forward and laughed aloud as if much amused. Goss was suspicious. He leaned back when Waggles clapped a left hand on Dodge's shoulder and shot forward his right hand for a farewell shake.

"Well, till I see you again," said Waggles, turning away.

Without looking after his friend Dodge smiled and nodded, his hand resting palm down where he had placed it after the handclasp. Goss' dark eyes half-closed. Dodge turned as if to get the attention of a waiter. Goss brought his hands together before him. Dodge carelessly faced about, then suddenly lifted the thirty-one caliber

Colt that Waggles had passed to him in bidding him farewell.

The six-inch barrel glittered in the sunlight for an instant, then exploded. Almost the same moment there came an answering report from the other end of the table. Dodge half rose from his seat, his left hand going to his heart. Goss stood erect, his hand nearly enveloping the tiny double-barrel derringer, tiny as to size but big of bore, and easily carried in a sleeve-holster.

"Drop that gun!" Goss commanded. "It's a good one but too light."

Dodge's face bleached out. The revolver slipped from his hand, but it was a deathly weakness and not the warning that disarmed him. He took two steps from the table and slumped down on his knees.

"By ——! Goss murdered him!" yelled Bill Waggles from beyond the tables.

Goss raised his hand as if to fire. Waggles ducked and ran for cover behind the wagons. Benches had been overturned when the two men fired at each other. The majority of the men were in a mad stampede. Goss called out:

"It's all over. He tried to murder me. No need to run."

And he slipped the derringer back in his sleeve.

Several men ran to Dodge, and were surprized to find him alive. They were greatly amazed to discover a hole through the woolen shirt directly over the heart. The garment was torn open and then the miracle was dissipated. Covering the heart and held in place by harness of leather was a small plate of iron, circular in form and the size of a small stove-cover. Goss walked forward and grinned sardonically as he saw the bit of armor. Opening his shirt he showed he wore no such life-saving device, and denounced:

"He wouldn't risk a square fight. Crooked in fighting as he is in his monte game. He planned to get me and put on that rigging. But he didn't reckon on my being here this noon. He signaled for Bill Waggles to come and help him. He didn't dare go for his gun but told Waggles to slip him one when he shook hands. Waggles did it. I saw what was up and ducked just in time. His lead combed my hair."

"This come near being a bloody business," said one of the men. "Your bullet caught him right over the heart. It ain't your fault you didn't kill him."

"He had five shots left. I had one. It was his pocket Colt against a Remington double-barrel derringer. One would naturally back the Colt for accurate shooting."

"If you two had to fight why did you have to come where honest men might get killed?" asked another.

"I wasn't starting it. It was for Dodge to pick the place and for me to be ready," defended Goss. "He selected this place. He brought the fight to me. Shooting in a crowd is dangerous. Let him name the time and place and we'll settle our trouble without damaging anyone else."

Dodge groaned and permitted the men to help him to his feet. He untied the cord holding the iron plate in place and let it drop to the ground.

"You seem to be alive, Dodge," said Goss. "When you feel fit we'll meet again. Down on the flats beyond Malta or up the ridge in the pines, Injun fashion. You name time and place and style of fighting."

Without a word the monte man turned away and walked to the street where he was joined by Bill Waggles.

"This means one of you fellows must quit the gulch," spoke up a citizen.

"It means they both must get out," corrected James Johnson, one of Oro's merchants.

"All right," quietly agreed Goss. "The game runs against me. Yet all I've done is to protect myself from a murderer. No one else is denied that right. I'll clear out when Dodge does. Maybe he and I can travel together part of the way."

Dodge, however, did not wait to be ordered from the camp. Almost before the citizens had ceased discussing the affair, he and Waggles had ridden from Oro. Ellis hunted up Goss to big him good-by and was pleased when he was told:

"Sentence suspended. Don't have to go now that Dodge ducked out. But I'm down on this camp and will be traveling soon."

THAT evening men from the flats down at the entrance to the Arkansas valley reported the loss of five horses by theft. When word reached Oro City a small mounted posse was sent down the road toward Twin Lakes, it being suspected that Dodge and Waggles had stolen the animals. Before morning the posse returned, having overtaken the two men a dozen miles from the gulch. They had camped openly and had only the horses they were riding. Ancient Days advanced the theory that wandering Utes were the thieves.

"Ouray is friendly," he told a group of miners at the breakfast hours, "but that don't mean all his young men are angels. There's a band of thirty or forty he can't control. They followed a white man, who was kicked out of Salt Lake City two or three years ago."

"The White Ute chief," added Goss, who was up early to hear the news concerning Dodge. "I knew him when I was in Salt Lake. Called himself Lomsom. Knifed a sleeping man in Pete Dotson's outfit as it was bringing to Denver the first flour ever sent out of Salt Lake City. The White chief will steal anything he can move. Yet you'll find out, if you ever learn the truth, that no Indians ever stole the horses. Work of white men."

"Maybe you'll go so far as to name the men," suggested a merchant.

"I make no bones of saying I believe Dodge and Waggles took the horses," promptly answered Goss. "I can't prove it; but I believe it. It didn't just happen. It was carefully thought out. Waggles is a bad one. He comes here every few weeks. Spends money at the tables and bars but he never works. He has a brother that's just as bad as he. Dodge is friendly with the two."

"It's the old Criterion saloon gang of Denver reorganized to work the camps," declared Wolfe Londoner's clerk.

"Some members of that gang may be active in these parts, but don't fool yourselves into thinking there isn't a highly organized gang, for there is. It operates from this gulch to Taos by the way of Cañon City, Pueblo, and Trinidad. The Arkansas headquarters are somewhere on Beaver Creek and near Cañon City. The Waggle boys, 'Dutch' Charlie Brown, fellow named Bateman and another called Steele, Minnesota man, are in it. Dodge is close to the leader."

"Never heard a word against Charley Dodge," declared Skillings, with a baleful side-glance at the gambler.

Goss informed the hotel man:

"Well, he killed three men in one year. Murdered them. He and a fellow named Noble followed a miner who had made his raise and was starting for the States. Overtook him to a cabin fifteen miles below Cañon City. Killed him, but only half buried him. That was last winter and they got several thousands of dollars. Went to Pueblo, and Dodge shot a constable called Taos for no reason whatever except Taos said he would like a cup of coffee.

"He jumped Fred Lentz's claim early this summer and sold it to another man. Lentz took the matter before the Claim Club in people's court in Pueblo. Dodge met him on the road and shot him dead. Dodge gave himself up and stood trial with two six-shooters in his lap. No one wanted to be killed, and when a division of the house was called, he was found not guilty. That was last spring. Then he came up here."

"And you knew all this about him and said nothing?" reproached Johnson, the merchant.

"I never tell what's in a man's hand if he don't try to foul my hand. I'm not the law. Plenty of folks in the Arkansas valley know Dodge's record better than I do. He was supposed to have gone to Washington Territory when he escaped arrest at Montgomery City. Instead he came down here. Besides running off cattle and horses they get rid of lots of counterfeited United States script. When I'm sworn in as an officer and told to get Dodge I'll get him or not come back. As it is now I've got to kill him or be killed when we next meet. And you folks were for running me out of camp because I play cards for a living and wouldn't let the snake murder me."

That evening Charley Youngblood, name assumed, well known in many of the camps, arrived from Central City, the gateway to the Gregory Diggings. He announced that Denver was excited over Missouri guerillas. He said the private mint of Gruber and Clark was heavily guarded as it was believed some Missouri men were planning to rob it. As the mint was coining from ten to fifteen thousand dollars a day it could be considered a tempting prize. Youngblood's news was linked up with what Goss had said.

The last exciting rumor had barely crested the tide of gossip before Londoner's clerk was warning Oro citizens to examine their script carefully as the store had taken in some counterfeits. Indians, horse thieves, possible raids on the Denver mint were forgotten by those holding script. Several thousand dollars in counterfeit was found in the camp's paper money. Goss burned a hundred dollars in a saloon. Skillings raved profanely on exhuming twenty dollars of the bogus article.

Despite these varying phases of excitement, including that caused by the receipt of war news from the old California crossing two hundred miles away* hunting for gold continued to absorb attention.

Some had upbraided Nathan Goss for not divulging Dodge's history and, now the camp was possessed of it, there was no effort made to find him. So Goss plied his predatory occupation at the tables; the Singing Pilgrim advanced in popularity each day until the Great West Hotel did a capacity business and was one of Rabbit's best customers. Ancient Days clung to his job as assistant cook while waiting for Big Bones to recover his wits.

The latter did his work with mechanical precision, and each morning saw monsters up the slope. But Ancient noticed he never mentioned them while at work on the tables and listening to the singing.

"Dawgone, Pilgrim, I believe you're going to cure Bones with your music," declared Ancient.

As it must always be where adventure leads, the bulk of the long camp's population were men in the prime of life. Denied, for the most part, the society of women the whimsical vagaries of the eternal boy lay near the surface in most of them. Horseplay and practical jokes softened the tedium of hard work, and the arrival of an unusually green greenhorn was often seized upon as affording further relaxation.

One day the crowd waiting for the mail was highly pleased at the appearance of a new arrival. It was not his attire that attracted attention as long black coats, trousers stuffed into new boots and tall hats were no novelty in Oro City. The developed mines in Colorado were to pass into the control of eastern capital in little more than a year.

Already the Eastern bankers and speculators, immaculately attired in the home mode, were beginning to visit the camps. As a class the professional gamblers dressed with elaborate smartness, or exaggerated the somber garb of the parson. What caught the eye of the loungers up and down the street below the express office was the mincing gait of the tall man alighting from the stage.

His height was accentuated by a tall hat; his long black coat was new. Black trousers were stuffed into boots which gallantly reflected the sunlight. But it was his manner of picking his way over the rough road that caused eyes to sparkle.

No jibes were called after him, but before he had taken a dozen steps a frowsy, mud-caked miner was close at his heels, imitating his finicky bearing with ludicrous faithfulness. The hint was instantly taken, and silently a score of men fell in behind the stranger in single file, each giving a burlesque of the newcomer's mannerisms.

One man snatched up a section of stovepipe from a store doorway and held it on his head for a tall hat. As the silent procession advanced those on both sides of the street fell in, as if performing some ritual. The unsuspecting leader produced a handkerchief and wiped his forehead. The gesture was quickly imitated with pieces of burlap and other odds and ends serving as handkerchiefs, and was performed with superlative daintiness.

Ellis and Nathan Goss were standing near the express office, anxious to receive Eastern letters; the latter entirely cut off from old ties, yet present because of his sympathy with that which he had deliberately given up. Goss nodded down the street and remarked:

"What's up? Must be a pilgrim with money about to buy the town a drink."

"Must be fifty following him in single file, like Indians," mused Ellis.

The stranger flicked a bit of dried mud from his coat sleeve. A fringe of hands, the length of the line, at once duplicated the gesture with great airiness of motion.

Goss' somber eyes lighted as he sensed the situation, and he chuckled.

"He doesn't know they're trailing him."

As he spoke the stranger tipped his tall hat a bit to one side. Fifty ragged and dilapidated bits of headgear were instantly readjusted with great nicety. The stranger discovered the express office and halted and removed his hat to wipe his forehead. The long line did likewise.

Goss, who seldom laughed aloud, gave away to his amusement until the tears blurred his eyes. The stranger glared at him wrathfully, then happened to glance back. For a second he stared in surprize at the frowsy face of the man close to him, then darted his gaze down the grimacing, smirking line. With a roar of rage he jumped to one side and reached inside his tightly buttoned coat. There began a mad effort to get out of range.

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*Julesburg.

The weapon he pulled out was a bullwhacker's whip, a two-foot handle and fifteen feet of lash.

Before the procession could more than commence disintegrating, the long lash coiled in circles for an instant, then leaped forth, and the exploding crack was answered by a howl of anguish, the recipient losing a piece of his trousers and a segment of flesh. The fun-makers broke into mad flight, with the long whip cracking like a pistol, each detonation eliciting a scream as a testimonial to the unerring accuracy of the wielder.

The man who had initiated the sport kept close to the stranger to escape punishment. Now he was told:

"Run, you hairy son of a gun! I'll count ten fast."

The counting commenced immediately The bewhiskered man leaped convulsively up the street, jumping from side to side; and just as he was almost out of range the whip exploded, and with a screech the runner clapped both hands to his wounded anatomy and bounded high and far.

The stranger then gave his angry attention to Goss, who was weak from laughter. After a brief scrutiny the stranger grinned broadly and exclaimed—

"Darned if it ain't Nate Goss!"

Goss straightened and wiped his blurred eyes and stared in surprize. The next moment he was shaking the big hand warmly and declaring:

"This is the best joke of all! Good ——! Playing old Whip King for a pilgrim."

And he leaned against the building and went weak again. Finally he managed to ask:

"But why this outfit, Whip King? And where are your handsome whiskers?"

WHIP KING grinned sheepishly, sat down and pulled off his polished boots and tossed them into the street. He sighed with relief as he felt his aching feet expand and his cruelly pinched toes straighten out.

"Dang them boots!" he muttered. "And dang the whole rig! So they ain't hung you yet, Nate?"

Goss sobered and demanded—

"Where you from and why this outfit?"

"Just took a train through to Buckskin from Kansas City. One thousand pounds to a yoke. Didn't reship or lighten the load once. It's never been done before. Makes me feel high-faluting. Took a notion to play gentleman, Shaved my whiskers and bought these clothes and—tight boots. Crippled my feet for life. No more Eastern ways for me. Tell the boys the drinks is on them but that I'll pay."

The invitation was enthusiastically accepted, and Whip King on the spot became a great favorite. But more than one man winced as the gambler declared his friend to be the greatest wagon train boss between the crest of the continent and the river.

Thanks to Goss, the Great West Hotel had Whip King for a patron, with many of his new friends following him. Garbed in flannel shirt and rough boots and carrying his whip he was boisterously saluted by those who informed him they had received his "card."

Whip King apparently had no particular business in Oro and it was assumed he had drifted down to the gulch from Buckskin to prolong a spree before taking a train back East. He drank considerable whisky with his supper and took up a collection of nearly a hundred dollars for Ellis after the latter had sung "Sweet Betsy From Pike."

As he and Goss were leaving the table he asked:

"Heard anything of Charley Dodge this season? In Buckskin some said he'd gone up to the Snake River country, others said he'd come down here. I met him once in Pueblo."

"He's been here part of the season. Quit camp a few days ago. He's no friend of mine. If he's your friend I have nothing to say."

"Just happened to know him. Kill him so far's I'm concerned."

"Tried to, but he was wearing a chest protector."

Goss described the quarrel.

"Reckon he's a bad one. Had some sort of trouble when I met him in Pueblo.

Then there's a young idiot who come in my train two months ago. Called Euclid. Wonder if anyone has killed him off."

"Never heard of him. Hasn't been here in my time."

"Well, you ain't missed much. Most active cuss you ever see and never gets anything done. Last time I saw him was in

Central City and a crowd wanted to hang him. Set up as an assayer and told the boys he used the cold dry process to secure chemical reaction. Ain't that——? When he found that a piece of a grindstone assayed three hundred dollars to the ton, the boys allowed he was ripe for a rope. I explained how his head was bad and he drifted on somewhere."

Goss gave up gambling that night and devoted himself to entertaining his friend. Ellis was invited to go along but refused, being in a black mood. All the men he knew were making money or appeared to be on the verge of success. Very few were engaged in menial work; and he bitterly told himself his place was with some Mexican boys, Ancient Days, a derelict, and Big Bones an eccentric.

Ancient did not improve his spirits when he announced his plan of taking Big Bones down to his small ranch near Cañon City, where he believed he could permanently cure him of his sporadic delusion.

"I believe a winter spent there will fix him all right and we'll be ready to work in double harness next season. He'll be a master hand to help me hunt for the Doyle mine if he can keep twenty-foot lizards out of his head."

Big Bones joined them and begged Ellis to sing. Ellis was not in the mood, and was for hunting his blankets. Skillings, inside the first wagon, angrily called out:

"Stop that —— gabbing! I want to sleep."

"He's more'n half drunk," said Ancient. "Been steaming up ever since the supper hour."

Ellis would have retired, but Big Bones loudly spoke up:

"That man talks rough. He don't know anything. Told me I didn't see any terrible animals."

Skillings heard him and swore loudly. Then he emerged from the end of the wagon, viciously drunk. His first act was to aim a blow at Big Bones. Ellis caught his arm and warned:

"None of that. Get back to your blankets and sleep it off."

"Well, —— your young hide!" roared Skillings. "You've got so uppity with your song-hooting you forgit who's bossing this outfit. When a man working on my tables gits the notion he's bigger'n the Great West Hotel, and is bigger'n the boss of that hotel, it's time he hunted a new job."

"I'll hunt one in the morning. The Boston will be glad to hire me," bitterly answered Ellis. "I wouldn't work another day for you for any amount of money."

"And we go where the Singing Pilgrim goes," added Ancient Days.

"Yes, yes," eagerly agreed Big Bones. "His singing makes my head feel better."

Skillings was not so befuddled as not to realize that this wholesale desertion would spoil the remainder of his season. He raved like a madman and quickly attracted a street crowd.

"You sneaking dawg!" he berated, when he could talk intelligibly. "You come crawling, begging for work. Now you've sold out. You've sold me out to the Boston. You've rigged it to put me in cap. They may call you the Singing Pilgrim, but they'll never say you're han'some after I fix your face over."

He reached for a knife in his belt.

"You try any game on me and I'll kill you," passionately warned Ellis. "If I don't kill you when you try it I'll kill you the first chance I get. So you be sure and leave me dead if you begin anything."

With a howl Skillings yanked the knife from his belt and gathered himself to attack. Ancient Days dove under a wagon, wildly searching for the long knife he had laid aside. Skillings began edging toward Ellis, who stood with his back to a wagon. The onlookers yelled for him to run, but the man in front of him was two close. The Indian hunter, the Rabbit, struggled wildly to break through the crowd, insisting:

"Get out of the way! Give me a shot! He'll murder the boy!"

But the spectators, as a crowd, were not intelligent, and the road was not cleared for the hunter.

Ellis braced himself against the wagon, undecided whether to try to dodge under his assailant's arm or to trust to a well-directed kick. With a grunt of satisfaction. Skillings circled the point of the knife before him and crept closer. As he advanced a foot to make a lunge, a burly figure burst from the crowd, and there came a swish and an explosive snap, and Skillings howled and dropped his weapon to nurse a bloody wrist.

Instantly Ellis ducked, secured the weapon and would have leaped upon his assailant had not some of the spectators rushed forward and held him. Frantic with rage he kicked and struggled, but the knife was taken from him.

Whip King advanced and pushed him against the wagon and warned:

"Wake up, sonny. Get over your mad. It's all finished."

Then to the crowd he boasted:

"I can lift a deadhead steer off his feet. Just give me more room."

And the long lash snapped over the heads of the men. They scrambled one side and Whip King told the bewildered Skillings, "Back into your wagon, you drunken fool."

And he encouraged celerity by cutting a patch from the woolen trousers. Skillings jumped frantically and was caught again. Bawling with pain he made a mad dash for the wagon, the whip pursuing him with venomous ingenuity and fairly lifting him over the tailboard. Then lounging to the opening the freighter advised—

"Stay in there till morning if you don't want to lose both legs."

Ellis was beside himself with rage.

"Someone lend me a gun!" he cried. "He called me names. He'd have killed me! Goss! Goss! Let me have a gun."

This to the gambler who suddenly appeared in the light of the lanterns illuminating the wagons.

"Simmer down. It's all over," advised Goss. "The fool was drunk. He'll beg you overlook it when he sobers off."

"I'll never overlook it," passionately retorted Ellis. "He would have killed me. Ancient, fetch me the cook's gun."

Ancient shook his head. Glimpsing the dark face of Rabbit he pleaded—

"Lend me your rifle!"

The Indian leaned on his rifle and answered:

"An evil spirit is laying down a blue path at your feet. Do not walk in it."

Whip King caught Ellis by the shoulder, shook him, and quietly said:

"You'll have no gun. You'll kill nobody. No more of that bad talk. You're het up now. Names never broke any bones yet. If I couldn't a reached him with my tickler I'd shot him off his feet. He'll be sore and sorry in the morning. Go to bed and forget it."

Ellis' mad rage passed, leaving him weak and sick. Goss took his arm and led him one side where the Indian was standing, inexorably condemned to that blue path he had warned the young white man to keep out of.

"Just forget about that drunken fool," Goss murmured. "That row didn't amount to anything. If you want to see real trouble, keep your eyes open. Charley Dodge is back in the gulch. Came in after dark."

Startled by this ominous information Ellis partly forgot his own troubles and asked—

"You mean he's come back to find you?"

"To get me. He came alone, but he has friends and horses waiting at the mouth of the gulch. Plans to pot me during the night and then make a run for it. I'm going down the line with Whip King to meet him and have it out. You go to my shack and turn in. In the morning you'll feel better, and wonderfully glad you haven't killed any one."

Ellis desired to accompany the gambler and the freighter but his company was promptly refused by Whip King, who advised:

"Never hook your fingers into a dish of trouble unless it's to help a friend. You can't help Nate. All I can do is to stand by and see he has a square shake. Go to bed."

The two friends began their search by making inquiries at several gambling places where loyalty to the calling rather than friendship made every card-man an inactive ally of Goss. An hour's still hunt, which took them two miles down the gulch, failed to discover any trace of Dodge. In the last resort they visited the proprietor whispered to Goss:

"Knew you'd be in here. Dutch Brown went down the line in a rush half an hour ago. Boys believe he took word to Dodge that you was hunting for him. Dodge is out of the gulch by this time."

"Didn't know Dutch was in this neighborhood," spoke up Whip King. "I'd like to meet him."

"I've heard lots about him. Never met him to know him," remarked Goss. "We might as well go back."

"Kindly wait long enough for me to bust the bank," requested Whip King.

He took a seat at the faro layout. Goss refused to play and sat with his chair tipped against the wall of logs, his hat almost covering his eyes. In his lap was a forty-four Remington revolver. The night had promised risks not to be encountered with short-range derringers. He waited patiently while his friend won and lost.

SEVERAL men entered, wandered among the tables. Some Goss knew by sight and the others were promptly classified as miners and store clerks. Then came a stranger who did not pause at the bar to drink before wandering down to the tables. He carried a gun in the waistband of his trousers. His face was round, his blue eyes were round, and his hair was yellow. He stared at Goss and the exposed revolver, and retreated up the room.

"Scared at the sight of the gun. Never would dare draw his own," mused Goss.

Shortly after the man went out, Whip King rose and quit the game, two hundred dollars loser, and expressed a willingness to call it a night. As they walked toward the front door the proprietor came from behind the bar and asked—

"You saw him, of course?"

"Who?" snapped Whip King.

"Dutch Brown."

"Good ——, no!" growled Whip King, sweeping his gaze about. "Has he been in here?"

"Walked in and down to the tables. Then hurried out. Thought you must have given him a bad look."

"I'll give— How long ago? Why didn't you say something, Goss?"

"Couldn't have seen him. Yet I had my eyes open. What did he look like?" asked the gambler.

"Round-faced feller with wide-open, blue eyes. Looks like a greenhorn. Looks like he was scared awful easy," replied the proprietor.

"Then I saw him. Thought he was scared at sight of my gun. He must have seen you, Whip."

"Just my cussed luck. Had a little piece I wanted to speak to him. Well, let's go. I must hunt a bed."

"Room in my hut. I sent young Ellis up there. Two can sleep on the bunk and one on the floor."

He insisted on taking the street ahead of Whip King, and did so with his gun cocked. But no foe was lying in ambush. The two picked their way over the debris, keeping to the middle of the straggling street and about twenty feet apart. The town appeared to be abed until they had passed Londoner's store. Then they heard the clamor of excited voices and pressing on, found something had occurred to empty the night haunts and gather a crowd of men around the Great West Hotel wagons.

They ran across the street and Whip King, in the lead, asked the first man they came to—

"Has that bloody drunken —— of a Skillings busted loose again and done mischief?"

"Naw. Skillings won't bust loose again. Got an idea he won't cut up any more capers in this camp. He's dead. Murdered."

"Murdered!" whispered Goss to Whip King, and his dark face took on a worried look. Nor did he ask the man any questions as to the identity of the murderer.

He and Whip King forced their way into the light of the wagons. Skillings was on his back between the two wagons, stabbed through the heart. Goss got the attention of a citizen and asked—

"How and when did this happen?"

"As to when it happened we can't say."

"But Ancient Days and the crazy man must know?" insisted Goss.

"They must have seen it. They ran away. Either didn't want to tell what they knew, or were scared. They weren't here when one of the boys happened to walk on this side and see Skillings in the light of the lantern, just as you see him now. As to who did it, that's pretty clear. The Singing Pilgrim. He's skipped out."

"The Pilgrim never killed him," declared Goss.

"Why did he skip out if he didn't do it? There's his blankets untouched under the second wagon."

Goss started to explain Ellis' absence when another cut in, saying:

"A miners' court will make short work of the murderer. The Pilgrim will be fetched in as soon as the boys can catch him. He'll need a —— good alibi to explain away that dead man. Fifty men heard him vow he'd kill Skillings; heard him crying and begging for a gun even after Skillings went back to bed!"

"And why ain't he here if he didn't do it?" persisted another.

"He never did it. I'll look for him and bring him back," Goss told them.

To Whip King he whispered:

"Wait here. I must fetch him. After I

get a good start tell them I sent him to my hut. That'll be an alibi for him; but they mustn't find him first. He might try to run and get plugged."

Whip King nodded and attracted attention by taking a lantern and climbing into the first wagon. He was soon back and reporting:

"Fight took place between the wagons. Skillings came and must have started it."

"Innercent men don't run away," reminded one. "If the Pilgrim killed in self-defense, why ain't he and Ancient and Big Bones here to say as much?"

"For the simple reason he went to Goss' hut to sleep. Goss sent him there when he'n me left the wagons after Skillings went back to bed," explained Whip King. "I heard Goss tell him and I heard him say he would go. No mad in him then. Goss has gone to wake him up and fetch him here."

This made a strong impression as Whip King had won much goodwill since his arrival in Oro. But one citizen did insist: "Even if he went to Goss' hut to sleep he might have sneaked back."

"Never did it. He must have a square shake," firmly replied Whip King.

"Too much shooting and stealing and general cussedness. We're going to stop it if we have to stretch a dozen."

"Hooray! And I'll help on the rope so long as you don't stretch the wrong man," heartily agreed Whip King.

Believing Goss had had time enough to explain the situation to Ellis and prepare him against making a false move, the freighter announced his intention of going to meet the gambler and the suspect.

"We'll all go," some one suggested.

"More the better," agreed Whip King.

They started up the street but had barely reached the express office before they heard voices ahead shouting:

"Round him up! Guilty's ——!"

"Hang him!"

Whip King's face grew stern and he felt for his gun. Several torches smoked and twinkled ahead. The men by the express office halted and waited. Thirty or forty men were coming down the street, crying excitedly. Ahead walked Goss. When the two groups merged one of the torch bearers cried:

"Pilgrim has skipped out the gulch. Goss has to admit it."

The gambler confessed:

"The Pilgrim wasn't at my hut. I found it empty. I have no idea where and when he went. But I'm positive he never killed Skillings."

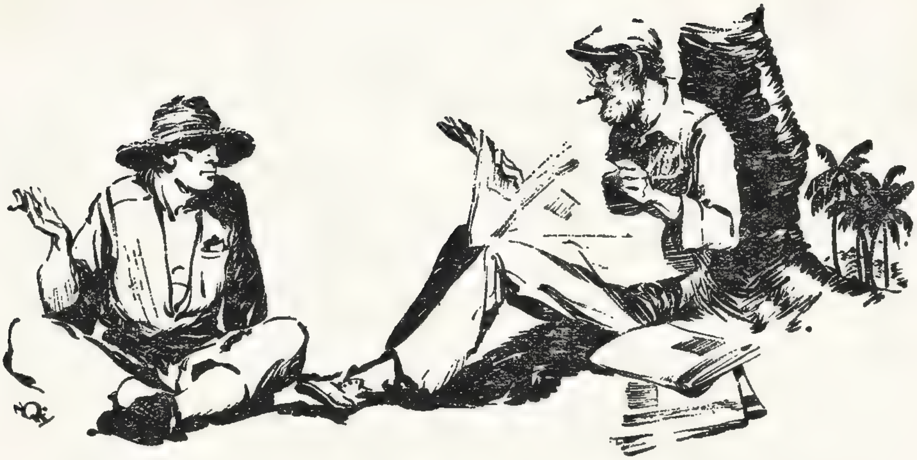
"Bah! You're too positive. You may have some explaining to do," a voice cried from the edge of the crowd.

Whip King dragged Goss to the corner of the building and hoarsely demanded:

"Did he confess? Did you tell him to skip?"

"The hut was empty. You could have knocked me over with a blanket. I hope they won't catch him; but I'm afraid he did it."

TO BE CONTINUED



Salvage* An Off-the-Trail Story

by Charles King Van Riper

Author of "Too Many Champions," "Requiem," etc.

NOT all the men in the army of the unemployed are conscripts of adversity. Hannibal Bixby was a volunteer, living on the beach a few kilometers from the French-Tahitian port of Papeete.

Bixby's presence in the South Pacific was a cause of international irritation. The colonial secretary-general and the American consul agreed that he ought to be deported. But there was a difference of opinion as to whether the French Republic or the United States of America ought to pay for it. Diplomacy had been exhausted—and Bixby remained.

Doubtless he should have been deported, for economically he was a weed and a thorn; thoroughly undesirable. Socially Bixby wasn't so bad, could talk intelligently on anthropology, pugilism or politics, read poetry rather well, and was a subscriber of the London *Times*, paid up before his present insolvency.

Mid-morning found the unwelcome Bixby on the waterfront, usually opposite the American consulate, deep in his paper. He was a spare, bearded man, shabbily dressed, sockless, and with the shrunken, threadbare cap he wore, drawn down in front to shade the lenses of his spectacles. Under the trees of the harbor road he was a studious, contemplative figure digesting his two-months-old British journal. The date did not disturb Bixby. He had eliminated time.

Sometimes Bixby sat on a bench or at the base of a tree. Again, he stretched out flat on the ground. But he always faced the sea, looking out over the smooth, tinted water of the harbor to the restless blue seas beyond the reef and the mystic, silhouetted mountains of Moorea, lavender-gray against the sky. The town was behind him: Hot streets of stores, gossipy streets of cottages, market sheds teeming and deserted in the single hour before the dawn, official residences and bureaus that suffered from their own pretensions. Scarcely any of the native things were left, few, even, of the true native people.

Papeete is a place of wood and stone and plaster, corrugated iron, half-castes, bicycles, broken hibiscus blossoms in the dusty roadways. There are soldiers, island schooners, French officials, quiet gardens, the smell of copra, rattling automobiles, Chinese, sorry-looking horses, brown women in shapeless Mother Hubbards, white women trying to improvise a touch of Paris in their isolation—absurd, pathetic. Bixby turned his back on the town, eliminated it.

Life had been a constant process of elimination with Bixby. He had rid himself of possessions, responsibilities, conventions. The less a man could get along with the happier he could be, reasoned Bixby. Here, in Tahiti, life was ideal. Reading his *Times*, he was utterly content.

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* *This is an Off-the-Trail story. See note at bottom of first contents page.*

"You're the king of the beachcombers?" asked a voice.

Bixby, with his back to the road, had not suspected that any one was near. He lowered his paper, slid his spectacles infinitesimally down his nose and looked up.

Facing him was a tanned, out-of-luck looking man. Bixby could not remember having seen him before. On his head was a sun-proof, double arrangement of two loose-woven pandanus hats, one inside the other, the wide brims haphazardly fastened with safety pins. The man's white shirt and trousers had seen hard wear. His bare, dusty ankles showed above a dilapidated pair of canvas shoes. Bixby surmised that the other was no newcomer to the tropics, for the shoes he was wearing had been resoled with pieces of old automobile casing.

Evidently the stranger decided there had been no mistake, that he was in the presence of royalty, for he sat down cross-legged beside the bearded beachcomber.

"My name's Cutler," he offered. "Nobody seems to know yours."

"Bixby," said the economically objectionable person, swinging one knob-like knee over the other and settling back.

"Smoke?"

Cutler fished a package of cheap cigarets from the pocket of his shirt.

"At every opportunity," said Bixby.

The lighting of the cigarets provided one breathless instant when it seemed Bixby's frowzy beard would be ignited by the match Cutler was holding out in a shaky hand.

"Thanks!"

Bixby breathed smoke and satisfaction, undisturbed by the passing danger of fire in his whiskers. Cutler drew three deep inhalations down into his chest, expelled the last of them and looked up at Bixby almost belligerently.

"Say," he demanded. "How can a guy get out of this place?"

"It depends on the guy," replied Bixby serenely. "I can't see why any one should want to get out of Tahiti, but—" He flicked the ash from the plebian Rosette with the attention and technic of an epicure. "What do you know?"

"I can do any sort of outdoor work," said Cutler. "I've been working steady over on Raratonga for three months, but it's too slow. A guy can't grind along that way. The women and booze would have gotten me again if I'd stayed. It's the same thing here, maybe worse.

"If I ever want to see San Francisco again, I've got to get away as quick as God'll let me. I'll do anything," Cutler finished desperately.

Bixby sighed and settled back against the tree.

"Down here it isn't what a white man can do, it's what he knows. I asked you what you knew. Do you know anything?"

Cutler's jaw set resentfully.

"You ain't no Thomas A. Edison yourself!" he retorted.

Where did the old bum get off to pull a line like that on him!

"That's right," agreed Bixby serenely, "Edison is smooth shaven. What else do you know?"

Cutler nearly choked.

"Say, 'Fuzzy,' " he fumed, "maybe I ain't no mental giant, but I'm no dumb-bell. I came to you, man to man, to ask you a decent, civil question because I figured you wouldn't turn me down. I'm up against it, up against it hard, savvy! I ain't a quitter and I stripped down to fight for a chance. What's more I've been getting by like I said for three months, but I can't keep going."

Cutler's hostility had passed, swept away in an intense desire to talk, to tell some one, to get help.

"I can't last out," he said in a strained, flat voice. "There's no good kidding myself. I can't do it."

Cutler was silent, scowling at the ground.

"Why there's been times," he went on in a husky whisper, "there's been times when my belly was quivering for a shot of booze and I've had to hold on to myself—" Cutler's hands clenched grimly—"till I was in a dripping sweat."

It occurred to Bixby to be curious.

"If you've been working for three months you must have some money."

"I've got thirty-eight dollars," said Cutler disgustedly, "but that won't pay my passage home. I've got to get more and get it quick, or I'll be back on the beach—to stay."

Bixby reflected. Thirty-eight American dollars meant nearly five hundred of the ragged franc notes current in Papeete. Two could live a long time on that in luxury and absolute indolence. There might be advantages in the man's society. He would have to get his renewal in to the *Times* in a month or so to avoid missing any copies when the present subscription expired. It was possible that the fellow was worth cultivating. Bixby studied him.

CUTLER had taken off his hats, was fumbling in a nervous pre-occupied way with one of the safety pins, clasping and unclasping it. He was a younger man than Bixby's first impression had lead him to believe, and he had rather a fine head of crispy brown hair. Allowing for the premature aging of dissipation that was traced on his face, Bixby judged the other to be just over thirty. Cutler was aware of the scrutiny, looked up with defensive insolence.

"Well, Fuzzy, what about it?" he challenged.

"I'm afraid you misunderstood my first question," the bearded one explained smoothly. "The intention was to find out if you knew—well, for instance, a trade of some sort?"

Cutler shook his head hopelessly. His frown deepened.

"I guess you're right, Fuzzy," he blurted. "That's why I was sore. I don't know a —— thing. I can do things, same as a horse can do them. I'm dumb as a horse, only I've got feelings, and can think, and can see ahead what's going to happen.

"Ah, ——, it's my own fault. The old woman couldn't make me go to school. I was wild, and run off and hung around with a bunch of bums. A lot of stiffs that kept telling me how good I was. I was 'Kid' Cutler then, fighting preliminaries at from twenty to thirty berries a night and thinking I was the cat's meow.

"Then they put me up against a regular guy and he socked me on the kisser so I lisped for a month. Only I didn't do any lisping around there. I couldn't feature hearing all the gang saying how tough it was I lost and feeling sorry for me. As if they would!" Cutler laughed unpleasantly. "Anyhow, I beat it, and that's what got me into this."

He streamed profanity.

Bixby waited until the oaths had subsided.

"Then you know how to fight," he said impassively.

"I know how," said Cutler, "only I can't. Buck Hurley learned me that the night he made a sucker out of me. I ain't had a glove on since."

"Hurley was matched to fight Leonard for the championship on the fourteenth of April," remarked Bixby.

"Better Leonard than me!" declared Cutler. "I wish him luck, champion or——"

He stopped abruptly. April? This was mid-June. Two months ago. . . .

"Say, who won?" demanded Cutler.

"I don't know," said Bixby.

"Didn't the paper say?"

Cutler jerked a thumb at Bixby's copy of the *Times*.

"I haven't come to it yet," said Bixby. "Probably there is an account of the fight in one of the issues that arrived by the last boat."

"Haven't you looked?"

Bixby shook his head.

"I only read one a day, in the order they're dated. It keeps all the items in sequence. I haven't come across anything about the fight so far."

"And you haven't tried to find out?"

Again Bixby shook his head. And so did Cutler.

"Now in your case—" Bixby resumed leisurely.

Cutler slanted a questioning look at his companion. Bixby paused, humming judicially in the depths of his whisker.

"In your case, my friend," he went on, "you have made the common error of neglecting the thing you are equipped for. My advice to you is to go back into the ring."

"Who? Me!" hooted Cutler. "Say, Fuzzy, look at me. I'm shot. My wind's gone. Put me in a cage with a canary and I'd be birdseed. I can't fight."

"You know how," said the unruffled Bixby.

"All that I know never give me a headache."

"Like everything else, knowledge is relative," reasoned Bixby. "In your encounter with Hurley you were trying to take in too much territory—a future challenge for the world's title. Limit yourself—to Tahiti, for example."

There was a suggestive pause, but Cutler did not seem to grasp the possibilities. He was silent.

"Here you'd be colossal," declared Bixby impressively. "The native boys like to punch, but they are about as scientific as a Bible class."

Cutler lifted sullen eyes.

"Suppose I did get a fight," he muttered, "what'd there be in it? These guys ain't going to give you any kind of jack."

"You said you had thirty-eight dollars."

"Well?"

"Wagered at advantageous odds."

Cutler straightened up suddenly.

"I've got you!" he exploded. "Say, ain't I the sap! Sock down the cash on the other guy—quit to him—collect. Right!"

"What a rare intelligence," purred Bixby.

"Great stuff, Fuzzy," cried Cutler enthusiastically. "We'll frame it, you an' me."

"No!" reverberated Bixby, his beard fairly bristling. "I'll have nothing to do with such an enterprise!"

Cutler looked blank.

"Do you mean to say," he stammered, "that — that you're particular — about — about being on the level?"

Bixby writhed. What a clod the fellow was! Bixby had long since eliminated the moral sense. It had been one of his earliest and most successful eliminations.

"Don't make me laugh!" snorted Cutler. "I'll bet that throwing a fight is an act of charity alongside some of the stuff you've pulled, 'Whiskers.' "

"I don't quarrel with your honesty," Bixby retorted, "but with your lack of intelligence."

"Huh?"

"Hasn't it occurred to you," the bearded one recited scathingly, "that the native boy would go into the ring a big favorite. If you wagered your thirty-eight dollars on him at the odds that would prevail you'd be lucky to make five dollars on the investment."

Cutler's jaw sagged.

"If you want money, you have to back your own chances to win," asserted Bixby, "and you have to win. If you do you'll be comfortably aboard the next mail steamer going north. If you don't——"

He shrugged his shoulders, and rose stiffly. "Think it over."

Bixby tucked his folded copy of the *Times* under his arm. Cutler was standing too.

"If you want to see me, I'm here mornings from ten to twelve. Almost any other time you'll find me out where I'm living. Take the road to Arue, cross the big bridge and the next one you come to strike along the river toward the sea."

"What have you got, a shack?" asked Cutler.

"Just a shack," said Bixby, smiling through his beard, "but it's a splendid location—right on the beach. Let me have a cigaret, will you?"

Cutler took one from the crumpled yellow package and gave it to him. Hannibal Bixby departed at a meditative pace.

Cutler lighted a cigarette for himself, filled his lungs with a long puff and sat down to think.

Bixby did not leave town at once. He had some inquiries to make, questions that must have mystified those to whom they were put. Starting out leisurely along the Arue road, the bearded one reflected on the possibilities that might result from the meeting with Cutler and the interviews that had followed.

CUTLER was waiting when Bixby brought his *Times* to the waterfront the following morning. The beach comber nodded casually, as if the other had been expected. Cutler grinned.

"I found out about that Hurley-Leonard fight," began the newcomer.

"Naturally," sighed Bixby, settling down on the grass. "You would."

"It was called off," Cutler explained. "A fellow told me there was a notice about it in one of the wireless bulletins. Say, why don't you read them instead of stuff that's a couple of months old? You could keep right up to date."

Bixby looked at him disinterestedly and then, with the supreme comment of silence, turned to his paper and began to unfold it. They sat for a while without a word, Cutler scowling at his dilapidated shoes and Bixby reading placidly. It was Cutler who spoke.

"Remember what you were talking about yesterday?" he offered reluctantly.

"About your fighting?" Bixby did not look up from his paper.

"Yes, that's it," admitted Cutler.

Bixby continued to read.

"Well," went on the other. "I was wondering, if I decided to do it, could you get me a fight?"

Bixby put down the *Times* abruptly. "That occurred to me, too. I inquired yesterday."

"Could you get me a fight?" asked Cutler.

"I have," replied Bixby.

"Huh!" Cutler's jaw sagged.

"I've arranged two fights for you," said the beachcomber.

"You've what?" Cutler demanded.

"I've made arrangements for you to fight tonight at the Modern Theater," Bixby continued in a matter-of-fact manner.

"Tonight!" echoed Cutler.

Bixby nodded.

"Tonight, and two weeks from Saturday you meet the champion of French Oceania."

Cutler was gasping.

"Say, I can't get into shape in two weeks," he spluttered, "and if you've got any idea that I'm going into the ring tonight, get it out of your skull!

"I told you I was all in," he complained. "A cripple could beat the mug off me. What's the idea of fixing up fights for me anyway! Who told you I wanted to fight?"

Bixby's eyes narrowed.

"You don't want to fight, but it's fight, or stay here."

"Tonight!" Cutler repeated protestingly.

"They're not going to let you challenge the champion without some sort of reputation," said Bixby with a metallic ring in his words. "There's a chance to meet him in two weeks. To get it you have to go into the ring tonight and prove yourself."

"Who would I be up against?" asked Cutler suspiciously.

"A boy named Piti."

"Is he good?"

Bixby shrugged his shoulders.

"I told you yesterday it was all relative. There's no question of whether Piti is good or bad. The important thing is whether you are better or worse than he is."

Cutler considered.

"Say, Fuzzy," he said with a grin, "I thought you'd be surprized to see me show up this morning. Instead of that, you had it all doped out that I'd be back and got me dated up for a couple of battles."

"You'll fight?" Bixby was abrupt.

Cutler looked uncomfortable.

"You know the situation." Bixby gestured his freedom from further responsibility or concern. "Give me a cigaret."

Cutler produced a freshly opened paper of Rosettes.

"H'm," reflected Bixby. "Let me have the package. You'll have to train from now until the fight."

Cutler hesitated. Then the cigarets were surrendered, and Cutler had committed himself to the hands of his match-maker, because he didn't know what else to do.

THAT night Kid Cutler faced Piti, native lightweight, on the stage of the Modern Theater. The shallow platform of the big shed where Papeete gathers for its intermittent movies imposes limits on the Queensbury code. The traditional ring that is really a square suffers a further geometrical distortion. In Tahiti it is a roped-in rectangle nearly twice as long as it is wide.

The fight itself was an interlude in a program of pictures, a means of escaping the ruinous tax that the Colonial government imposes on an out-and-out *assaut de boxe*. With a deep-throated interpreter freely translating the sub-titles to a tumultuous audience, "Hell's Hatchway" had progressed to the point where the girl shrinks against the wall of the cabin as the brutal captain drunkenly locks the door. There the reel ended and a half-dozen natives went ardently to work drawing up the slack ropes of the ring.

The movie lady's endangered virtue was forgotten as the master of ceremonies came forward. Cutler was at his side. Nowhere else are there such language-annihilating announcements. Three times—in French, English and Tahitian—he told the crowd about Kid Cutler, one hundred and thirty-five pounds, challenger for the championship of French Oceania and appearing tonight against Piti to support his claim for a chance at the title.

At the right of the ring the narrow platform was massed solidly with fight followers, city officials, police, the young bloods of the town. M. Degnon, citizen of France and Mayor of Papeete, stood nibbling a handful of nuts and talking to the big capable Tahitian who was to referee. Out of this crowd came a strong, clean-limbed native boy, stripped to a pair of scarlet fighting trunks.

As he climbed through the ropes there was riotous cheering. This was Piti, opponent of the white man who sat across the ring. The master of ceremonies stood back, smiling paternally, while the ovation swept through the big shed. Gesturing for a chance to be heard, he advanced.

When the triple announcement of Piti's

vital statistics and local fame began, Cutler's breath came quicker. He posed professionally, lying back on the ropes with an appearance of complete relaxation, but the fibers of his body were tense and there was a quivering uneasiness at the pit of his stomach.

After all, he tried to tell himself, there was everything to win and nothing to lose. Bixby had counseled against betting on the fight. The money was to be staked on the outcome of the battle with the champion, if——

Cutler studied the smooth, powerful muscles of the young native smiling at the cheering mob in the theater. Bixby had said that these boys could punch, and not much else. Well, a punch was enough, almost any kind of a punch, if it got past Cutler's guard.

Six rounds? Cutler was sweating now. He remembered a night of sweat and blood and breath that blistered his lungs—leaden exhaustion. He was staring at the native boy, and his heart began beating against his ribs in an agony of fear.

A prodding from Bixby recalled Cutler to the ring. The beachcomber was standing behind him, a solitary, bearded figure in the white man's corner. Bixby pushed Cutler to his feet and shoved him toward the center of the ring for instructions.

Cutler's skin was pitifully ineffective against the glistening brown body of the native boy. There was a bewildered glaze over the man's eyes and a noticeable unsteadiness in his legs as he came back to his corner. But some how he managed the professional gesture of gripping the ropes, springing his weight against them and resining his feet.

The bell clanged.

"Get him," whispered Bixby.

Cutler whirled and went in.

His one chance was to win quickly. Two rounds or three perhaps was all he was fit for. Beyond that he would pay fourfold for every instant the fight lasted. The Tahitian came at him with a rush.

Cutler side-stepped and let the native drive himself against a short-arm jab that sent him back, staggering. The first exchange was the white man's. The native gathered himself and charged again. This time Cutler's fist crashed against the Tahitian's eye, and Cutler suddenly realized that it was going to be easy.

He hit Piti at long range and punished him in the infighting. The remnant of the moderate cleverness that had been Cutler's was magnified by the Tahiti boy's utter lack of skill. Piti, with one eye closed, lunged blindly at his shifting opponent and was stopped by Cutler's battering left and right.

Cutler came back jubilantly to his corner and the ministrations of his imperturbable second. Bixby was without enthusiasm. Cutler, excited and confident, did the talking as the other worked over him.

The gong called them for the second round. Cutler came up eagerly. He was going to play with the futile strength of the islander and finish him as he pleased. In thirty seconds Piti's other eye was swelling and he was bleeding from the mouth. Ten seconds later he was sagging against the ropes.

The crowd was aghast at the slaughter, but as Piti braced himself courageously and reeled forward there was a wild, heroic roar. Cutler, shifting out of danger, rode with Piti's desperate punch. But this time the white man had been too sure of himself. The blow was swifter than Cutler's calculation, caught him off balance and, before he could recover, another of the native's wild swings came crashing into his face. Cutler saved himself by covering up.

The white man had his big chance in the third round. Piti's bruised eyes betrayed him into blundering into Cutler's lead of a stiff left to the body. The punch dropped him in a heap in the middle of the ring. He tried instinctively to get up, sank back at the count of four. Then slowly and painfully the native forced himself to one knee and stumbled convulsively to his feet in front of the white man. Cutler swung again for the jaw.

The blow found its mark with a sharp, heavy shock. It should have sent the islander down again for the count. But Piti; with a dogged shake of his head, lurched forward and tore into the darkness that hid the other man from him.

Cutler stepped back. Something inside of him turned sickeningly. Every atom of speed and power and strength had gone into that punch, but Piti came on unchecked, plunging blindly toward him. Cutler felt suddenly weak and empty. Swamped by the sudden turn of the tide, he crouched behind his guard, sidestepping, giving ground, fighting desperately to keep out of reach of the islander's lashing fists.

The bell ended the round and the fight. Piti tried to get up when the gong clanged again, but he could no longer see and one of his seconds surrendered by throwing in a towel.

"I wasn't playing for a knockout," Cutler told Bixby later. "It was better the way it was. I'll get bigger odds on my money two weeks from now than if I'd put the kid away tonight."

"You think you could have finished him?" asked Bixby quietly.

"I could have knocked him for a goal any time after the first round," bragged Cutler.

Bixby leveled his calm eyes. Cutler's shifted uneasily.

"Don't you think I could?" he muttered.

"You know you couldn't," was the bearded man's answer. "You thought about the difference it might make in the odds for a wager after you left the ring. While you were in there all you could think about was what would happen if one of those punches hit you."

"What do you mean?" growled Cutler.

"I mean you were afraid of him," Bixby said steadily.

"Nobody can call me yellow!"

"No one has," came the icy reply. "I object to the word."

"Look here, Fuzzy," mumbled Cutler. "You know I wasn't in shape, one of those wild swings might have got me. Like I said, I was laying back for bets. I had him licked and was playing safe. I wasn't in condition. With two weeks work I'll——"

"It isn't your body that's sick, Cutler. Two weeks, six months or ten years can't cure you. You could train from now until your muscles were like mountain-sides and you had the lungs of the trade wind, but your heart would be pulp!"

Cutler was glowering.

"You were afraid of him," was Bixby's taunt.

"I'll smash you, you louse!" Cutler threatened hoarsely.

"No you wont," said Bixby. "You're afraid of me, Cutler. I'm telling you the truth, and you're afraid of that."

"You 'n'. me's through!" declared Cutler.

Bixby raised his eyebrows.

"Tahiti is a small place, and you'll probably be here a long time. We'll meet again. A man is not to blame for his limitations. I'm not prejudiced against you because of this dismal business. Here's your money."

Cutler reached out with an angry grunt for the tightly rolled bills Bixby had shepherded during the fight.

"This rabble will surround you and tell you what a hero you are," went on Bixby. "Don't believe them. I've been through you with a dark lantern. I know you, Cutler."

THE rabble was already arriving joyously to acclaim the winner. The bearded man turned his back on him and walked away. But as he was moving off he had the feeling that the other's eyes were following him. Cutler, stuffing the little bundle of money into his pocket, watched him until he passed through the door.

Hannibal Bixby spent that night in town. He hadn't finished with Cutler. Before he slept he concluded that a certain beachcomber known as "Whitey" would best be suited to his purpose. It would presently be necessary for him to communicate with this individual. Luck was with Bixby. Returning to Arue, he came unexpectedly on Whitey at the bridge where the path to the shack turned off the road.

Below the bridge a stout, matronly woman was bathing, the freshly washed family clothes piled on some stones at the edge of the stream. Her white cotton Mother Hubbard, already wet from the splashing work, was worn in the bath.

Bixby saw the woman crouch suddenly in the water, then scramble toward her day's washing and gather it up in excitement. At the same time the burra thicket parted and out of it came the beachcomber, called Whitey because of hair so strangely colorless that his head and brows and the lids of his eyes seemed to be bald, while the eyes themselves were startling unmasked.

When Bixby reached the bridge, Whitey was pawing at the woman. She twisted away from him, clinging desperately to the bundle of damp clothes. Bixby, leaning on the rail of the bridge, watched the encounter at the roadside. Whitey was advancing again.

The woman, her skin showing brown under the clinging wet dress, tried to avoid him, but Whitey sprang toward her. They struggled, without either having the advantage, until he wrenched away the bundle of clothes, scattering them over the ground. Instantly the native slashed at him with an open-handed, raking blow that cut four gashes across his cheek. As he stumbled back, the woman fled.

Whitey turned on Bixby with a curse.

"Why don't you mind your own business, y'old——"

He began a filthy rigamarole.

Bixby let him splutter.

"The woman seems to have persuaded you to mind yours," he said.

"You're lying," blustered Whitey, putting his hand to his clawed cheek.

"You're not worth lying to," said Bixby dispassionately. "You're a dog, Whitey, a filthy dog. Come down to the shack."

He turned his back on the other and went off along the path.

Whitey kicked viciously at a muddied shirt that wrapped itself around his leg, and followed.

Bixby's shelter was about nine feet square with walls of plaited cocoanut thatch and a *neo* roof. It's floor was the sand of the beach and the total of furniture two flimsy wooden boxes. On one of them was a battered lantern, a tin plate and a case-knife with half the handle gone. A rusty and dented oil-can filled with water stood just inside the door. There were two piles of newspapers, one laid flat and unfolded, the other stacked up in bundles as they had come in the mail.

Bixby smoothed out his *Times* and deposited it on the first pile, took off his shrunken cap and laid it on the papers, then went over to the kerosene can and dipped out half a cocoanut shell of water. He drank, the water spilling and trickling down his frowzy beard.

Whitey had come in and dropped down on the sand, stretching out at full length and staring up at the roof. Bixby had taken no notice of him. He put down the shell with a sigh and brushed his sleeve across his beard. Then he took off his coat and shirt, folding them elaborately and laying them beside his cap. Stripped to the waist, Bixby was a gaunt figure moving through the half dusk of the shack, his metal-rimmed spectacles and the shabby dignity of his brush-like beard in queer contrast with his nakedness.

Now he sat down, loosened his shoes and drew them off, working the toes of each foot in turn. This done, Bixby put the shoes down beside him and sat looking out through the door of the shack, hands clasped over his knees, his great toes pressed together and turned up. The lazy *swish* of the surf repeated a lulling rhythm.

"What d'y' want?" asked Whitey drowsily.

"Some one's coming out here."

Bixby still faced the doorway.

"I want you to attack him," he said in an expressionless voice.

Whitey propped himself up on one elbow.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

"He's got about thirty-eight dollars."

"When's he coming?" Whitey was sitting up.

"I don't know, but he'll be here."

"What'll I do, jump him?"

"Not too quickly," said Bixby. "Allow him to settle down. Then start a quarrel. I'll be in the door so he can't get away."

Whitey was rubbing his shins, his lips parted in anticipation.

"Thirty-eight dollars," he repeated. "Say how big is he?"

"About your size."

The subject seemed to be settled. Bixby dismissed it. Tahiti was so supremely satisfying. Tahiti in its tranquil but magical radiance. Cutler wanted to leave. Bixby sighed. What a mistake!

Whitey's bald, venal eyes moved in a shifting search of the shack. His glance narrowed as it rested on the rusty table knife. He got up, took the knife and ran his thumb over the rounded end of the blade. The steel was inserted in a crack of the soap box and bent over until it snapped, just back of the blunt point. Whitey examined the square break and its jagged corners with satisfaction.

Bixby, too, stirred himself. His pockets produced the stub of a pencil and a scrap of paper. On it he wrote four short sentences, read them over and, folding the paper thoughtfully, put it in his pocket. After that he sat looking out over the water, opalescent now under the declining sun.

THE smoky lantern was lighted when Cutler came. Bixby, with his back against the piled-up papers, took off his spectacles and closed them in his volume of A. E. Housman. Whitey came out of his doze and watched from the shadows. His hand fumbled for the reassuring feel of the knife, buried to the hilt in the sand.

Cutler stood uncertainly in the doorway.

"I thought you was alone," he faltered.

"Come in, come in," insisted Bixby, getting up and transferring the light from the pile of papers to one of the boxes. "Sit over there."

Bixby motioned the newcomer to the place from which he had just risen.

"Whitey, this is Cutler."

There was a thick sound from the corner where the lantern light gleamed indistinctly on a face like moist clay with two strangely direct and staring eyes.

"I thought you'd come," said Bixby, sitting down in the doorway.

Cutler could distinguish now the raw gashes across the white mask in the shadows. He shifted his position so he faced the third occupant of the shack.

Bixby stopped talking. At his back the hushing ebb of a wave over the sand left the night profoundly still. Before him in the shack there was unfolding an experiment, a test. Two possibilities. Bixby was secure whichever developed. It could only make a difference to Cutler or the crouching Whitey.

They were at the ends of the balance, he held the beam, weighing one against the other. Both men were playing Bixby's game. Whitey like a deluded fool; Cutler, blindly, in the dark. If Whitey won, the comforts that could be had with half of thirty-eight dollars were Bixby's. If——

The silence was cut by Whitey's snarl—

"What are you staring at me for!"

Cutler reddened in confusion.

"I—I—was looking—at the marks on your face," he stammered.

"What business is it of yours!" grunted Whitey.

From where Bixby sat he could see him gathering for the spring, the knife in his hand.

Cutler did not reply.

"What's it to you?" rasped Whitey. "Can't you talk?"

As the words twisted from his lips, the beachcomber launched himself at Cutler, the knife lunging to the target. Swift as it came, the cornered man threw up his arm against the threat. The blows met with crashing force. Whitey's weapon went spinning across the shack.

Bixby had gotten to his feet, was standing motionless in the doorway.

Cutler was up now, and, as Whitey came at him, drove his fist at the vicious face. It was a clean, solid right-hander that sent the other back, spitting. The shadows of the men were waving over the walls of the shack in gigantic distortion.

"Get the knife!" Whitey whispered jerkily over his shoulder at Bixby.

The gaunt figure in the door did not move. Cutler's sidelong glance caught the glint of the lantern light on the man's hard, emotionless eyes.

The instant Cutler's own eyes shifted, Whitey rushed him. Too late to block, Cutler took the punch, rolling his head just enough to save him from the full shock. There was blood at the corner of his lips. Covering up, Cutler waited until the other's impetus was spent, then sent him spinning back with a left to the body.

"Get that knife!" gasped Whitey.

"Keep out of this!" panted Cutler.

He saw the flesh twitching above the ragged beard.

Whitey came hurtling in, punching low, trying to trip up Cutler. He hooked his toe behind Cutler's heel, upset him and came crashing down on top as Cutler fell heavily backward, the breath jarred from his body, defenseless. Whitey was whimpering like a beast.

Cutler sickened with the stark horror of death. The man was going to kill him. The numbness of Cutler's body blunted the torture of Whitey's crucifying elbows and knees, grinding into him.

Fingers tightened at Cutler's throat. He clutched at the wrists, tried to tear the murderous hands away. They were locked fast. Whitey's naked face was inches from his own, the eyes foul, lips curling viciously. Cutler was choking. This was the end.

Cutler's fists clenched in rebellion.

The punch did not travel more than six inches. It split open the skin on Cutler's knuckles. The fingers at his throat relaxed spasmodically, and Whitey's body was a dead weight on his own.

Cutler's arm dropped lifelessly at his side. He lay for a full minute without stirring, each sobbing breath burning its way into his exhausted lungs. Whitey's caution had been swept away in his viciousness. Flat on his back, Cutler had knocked him out. He braced himself unsteadily and pushed. Whitey rolled over, limp as an oyster;

Over the ringing in his ears, Cutler could hear a voice. He turned his head painfully. He hadn't finished with them yet. The bearded man blocked the doorway. Cutler forced himself up, half-sitting, with one quivering arm supporting his weight.

"Get out of my way," he gasped, wiping the back of his hand across his lips.

Bixby was watching him with a wintry smile.

"There's no hurry," he purred.

Cutler's eyes shifted to the inert Whitey, then back to the man in the door.

"I don't want any more talk with you, see! I was sucker enough to blab about having some money and you two guys planned to get me." Cutler was on his feet. "Well—" he squared his shoulders—"I ain't so easy."

Cutler halted in his first stride toward Bixby. The beachcomber's hand had moved menacingly to his hip.

The men faced each other, Bixby's bare arm tense, as if the fingers were closing on some hidden weapon. For a flickering instant, Cutler was hypnotized by the threat. Then with a sob he flung himself at the man in the door.

Bixby was bowled over. Cutler stood for a moment drawing a deep, sighing breath of relief and triumph, then with a last look at the trap from which he had fought his way turned and ran stumbling across the beach to the path through the tangled thicket.

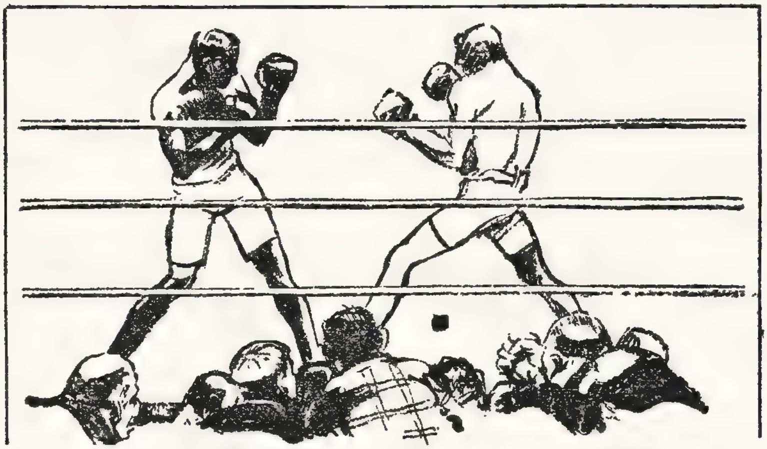
It was the beachcomber's beard that saved him. Cutler's fist would have done incalculable damage if the other had been clean shaven. Back in the hut he took from his pocket a folded bit of paper. It was the alibi he had prepared in case Cutler survived Whitey's murderous attack. Bixby had been reaching for it, to clear himself, when Cutler hit him. On the paper was written:

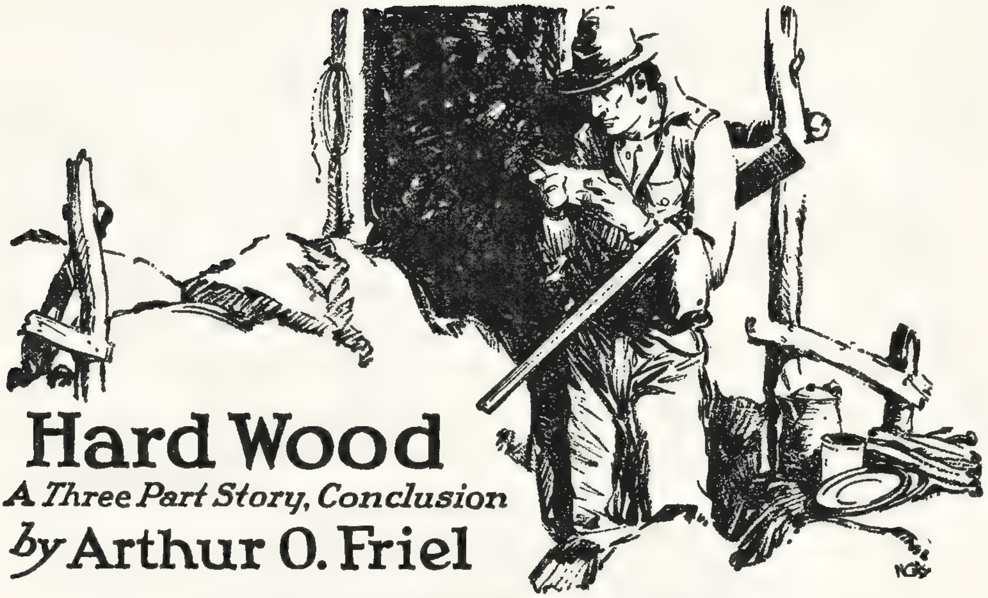
> Cutler is a victim of destroyed confidence. If he can be forced to fight he may regain it. The test is interesting. I will attempt it.

Hannibal Bixby felt thoughtfully of his stiffening jaw. Cutler seemed to have met the test. If only he had been less impetuous!

Not until now had Bixby realized how much his own effort had gone into the adventure. He yawned, and winced with the soreness in the south of his face. But after all, it had been distinctly worth while.

One of the thirty-eight dollars with which Cutler had come to Tahiti was pinned securely in Bixby's pocket and Bixby knew how he would bet when the white man went into the ring against the champion. The day following the fight, Hannibal Bixby reflected comfortably, he would remit for a year's renewal of the *Times*.





Hard Wood

A Three Part Story, Conclusion

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "Cat o' Mountain," "Mountains of Mystery," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

WHEN Harry Wood and his mother first went to live in "The Traps," up in the New York hills, he fell foul of Jerry Cooper, and thrashed him so completely that he earned for himself the name of "Hard Wood." Steve Oaks bestowed the name on him, and Steve was a good judge of men. The same day Jerry Cooper was nicknamed "Copperhead," for he tried to strike from behind, without warning.

The whole Cooper tribe, there were seven of them, took up the feud but, thanks to Steve's intervention, a deadline was drawn:—Hard Wood agreed to avoid the Cooper clearing, they agreed to keep away from the Wood homestead.

So matters drifted on for four years. Hard Wood grew to manhood. He became, indeed, hard, grim and quiet, swift to anger. The Traps people feared him and he had but two friends: Steve Oaks and old "Uncle" Eb, with whom Steve lived.

Then Mrs. Wood died. After the funeral Hard Wood left The Traps and tramped away through the woods, wandering from village to village as far as Kyserike. Here the memory of his mother's death was brought back to him when, on a scrap of newspaper, he read an account of a cure performed by a New York specialist on a wealthy inhabitant of Kingston. If he, too, had had money perhaps his mother might have been saved!

Eager to see his home again, he hurried back, only to find the house burned down. Instinctively he blamed the Coopers. His conviction became a certitude when he failed to find in the débris any trace of his mother's brass-bound chest.

He went to live with Uncle Eb and some days later, armed with a club, he slipped away to reconnoiter the Cooper clearing. When near the cabin he saw a girl coming toward him. It was Jane Cooper. He saw that local gossip was right: The girl was blind.

Unaware of his presence she sat down on a fallen tree-trunk and at her call birds and small wild creatures came to her. Suddenly Hard Wood saw a bobcat strike down a rabbit which had been close beside the girl. Terrified by the unseen danger, she stood motionless, while the bobcat, maddened by the taste of blood, crouched, ready to spring. Hard Wood leaped forward and dispatched the animal with his club.

In its death agony the cat mauled Hard Wood's legs so that he was compelled to go back to Uncle Eb's and remain inactive for several days. During this period the shrill presence of Uncle Eb's wife so exasperated him that on recovery he went to live alone in a well-hidden cave in the hills, where he decided to stay until he could square accounts with the Coopers.

In his rocky home he slept soundly for the first time.

THE following morning, while reconnoitering on the outskirts of the Cooper homestead, he saw Jed strike the blind girl. He dashed from his hiding place, and so savage was his assault that Jed cried out for mercy. His screams brought old man Cooper to the door, armed with a shotgun, and Hard Wood retreated hastily.

Later he met Steve, not the old easy-going Steve, but a new man, changed overnight into a killer. Uncle Eb, he said, had been shot from ambush by Jed Cooper, and he was going to "get" Jed. They set out together, only to be halted by two revenue officers. The latter had captured the younger Cooper on his way to town with moonshine whisky hidden beneath a load of charcoal. He had confessed, and the revenue men had come to arrest the whole tribe.

The four joined forces and attacked the house.

"Hard Wood," copyright, 1925, by Arthur O. Friel.

One of the revenue men was killed before the fight was over. Both Jed and his father died.

When the others departed Hard Wood found Jane hiding in the cellar. All feeling of pity vanished when he saw that she was wearing one of his mother's dresses, looted from his own house before it was burned. She swore she had no knowledge of the origin, but he would not believe her. He searched the house and, after taking a roll of bills which he found in a locker, set the place on fire. Then he took the girl to his cave where, he declared, he would imprison her for her share in the robbery.

Though protesting her innocence, she followed him without resistance. In the cave she tripped on a loose stone and fell, striking her head on the ground. When she arose, for a fraction of a second, she was able to see! But the light dimmed and went out, and again she was blind.

But Hard Wood, impressed by her sudden burst of emotion, at once repented his brutal resolution. A daring plan occurred to him and he decided to act upon it.

In the morning, he said, they would leave the cave for a place that was a "hull lot better" than Uncle Eb's.

And the girl, sensing the honesty of his tone replied—

"I guess I can trust ye, Hard."

CHAPTER XIX

UNDER THE MOON

"HARD WOOD! Ye dirty dog! Come outen that an' stand onto yer hind legs!"

Ice-cold, the voice dropped from the brink of Dickie Barre. Squatting beside his evening cook-fire, Hard started and threw a look upward. Then, as the epithet sank home, he grew hot and sprang to full height. Seizing his rifle, he swung in two strides to the edge of the outer room.

"Hey?" he snapped. "Say that ag'in!"

"Ye bet I will!" came the instant retort. "Ye dirty dog! What ye done with that gal?"

Hard's weapon twitched, but he did not raise it to an aim. He had marked the spot whence issued the voice, but he could see nothing there except the usual brush. Besides, he burned to punish that reviler with his fists rather than with a bullet.

"Show yer face, ye skulkin' coward!" he snorted.

"I'll show it soon 'nough," grimly. "I'm out as fur's I can git without slippin'. This ground's loose. But ye'll see me yit. I'm Steve."

"Steve!"

"Steve. Thought ye'd lost me, didn't ye? Ye pore fool! 'Fore ye try hidin' out ye'd better learn how to make a fire that don't smoke. Now ye tell me what I ast ye. What ye done with Jane Cooper?"

Hard flung back an angry laugh.

"What's that to you?" he jeered.

"Ye know mighty well. She was put into my care by Joe. Ye burnt the house while I was 'way an' snuck out. Wha'd ye do with that gal?"

The fierce intensity of his tone sent a slight chill over the man below. It was the voice of Steve the killer. But Steve was talking now to Hard Wood—to a Hard Wood rankling under that name of "dirty dog." And the answer he got was what might be expected.

"Ye bet I burnt it. I'd of burnt it if ye'd been there—an' throwed ye into it if ye didn't like it! An' the gal, she was put into my care as much as yourn, an' she's into better hands than yourn. Now what d'ye think o' that?"

Came sounds of a quick movement; a sudden scramble; a cascade of loose dirt and some bushes into the rocks. Steve's temper had slipped, and he with it. But he had stepped back in time. The narrow escape cooled his reply, but made it all the more menacing.

"I think this about that. Ye've been a friend o' mine, but ye ain't no more. Ye ain't a man. Ye're a dirty dog that run a pore blind gal into the rocks 'stead o' protectin' her. I'm a-goin' to give ye the same dose I'd give a sheep-killin' dog, soon as I git my sights onto ye. Then I'm a-goin' to git her outen there an' take her to Uncle Eb's, where she b'longs."

Hard stood mute. So Steve had turned utterly against him. Steve thought the same thing that the malicious gossips would think—except that he blamed the man and not the girl.

Then the jailer went hot again. Even now, there was time to explain, and Steve, despite his denunciation, would believe him. But he did not think or care about that. He answered with reckless defiance.

"Ye'll have a healthy time doin' all that. An' if that's the kind of a friend ye are, ye can come a-shootin', an' the quicker the better. Or will ye lay hid somewheres an' git me into the back? That'd be more like ye!"

A wordless growl from above. Then, in tones cold and controlled:

"Ye'll git all the shootin' ye want. Git this into yer head. That gal is a-goin' to where she b'longs. It ain't jest me that says so. It's the hull Traps that says it. The Traps is mad.

"The minute I start a-shootin' there'll be fellers a-comin' here from all 'round. There's some way into that hidey-hole o' yourn, an' it's a-goin' to be found. That gal's a-comin' out, an' you ain't.

"If ye're even half of a man ye'll give the gal a chance. Ye'll put her outside where she won't git hurt. It's 'most dark now, an' too late to git her outen the rocks tonight. But I'm a-stayin' right here, all night, with my ears open. Come mornin', I'm movin' down into them rocks. Ye can bring her out. After that I'll settle with ye.

"If ye don't fetch her out I start a-shootin'. An' we'll git her out. This thing is goin' to a finish—your finish. Now I've said all I'm a-goin' to."

A LITTLE more dirt dribbled down. Steve, still unseen, was moving back to safer footing. And then Jane, who had made no sound to show that she actually was there, cried out.

"Steve! Steve Oaks! You git out an' stay out, an' keep quiet 'bout us! Hard's been good to me. I'm staying' here 'cause I—I want to!"

Hard wheeled with a wrathful grunt. If only she had kept still, Steve would have had no actual proof that she was there; and it might have been possible, somehow, to save her from future odium. Now she had damned herself completely. And Steve was in nowise moved by her command.

"I know better," came his answer. "He ain't got no more mercy than a rock. Ye're a-sayin' that 'cause he's makin' ye. Don't ye worry. We'll git ye out."

"It ain't so!" she contradicted. "I'm all right an' I don't want——"

"Keep quiet!" Hard broke in.

"But——"

"Keep quiet, I tell ye!"

She obeyed. Frowning, he watched the upper edge awhile, then returned gloomily to his cooking. He knew there was little danger from above, since the character of the ground along the brink, steeply slanting and treacherous, prevented any one from reaching the verge of the cliff; he had long ago made sure of this. Nor could any one come out on the roof of his inner room, for all approach was blocked by a yawning crevasse a few rods behind it. Yet it was possible, at one spot, to cover with a gun the outer end of the shelf terminating in his entrance hole; and he felt in his bones that Steve would find that coign of vantage—probably had already discovered it. Thus the usual exit would be blocked. And in the morning——

Another grunt erupted from him. Silently, mockingly, he grinned up toward the invisible watchman. There was a way to elude his vigilance: a way by which, with luck, the whole Traps might be outmaneuvered.

For a little time, however, he was tempted not to take that way, but to stick and fight all comers. Steve, with the best shotgun in the Traps, and all the rest of them with their slower but no less deadly weapons—let 'em all come! His fast-firing new rifle would make 'em all sick! He'd lick the whole outfit. Vengefully he visioned a roaring battle in which he broke his assailants and drove them scuttling from his stronghold.

Yet he knew that it could not be. For one thing, they would not rush him—they could not; his fortess was too strong. They would cannily, relentlessly, besiege him, wearing him down until they got him in the end. His food supply was very low. He could get no more firewood. He must sleep sometimes. And, curse them though he might, he knew they were right. Though many of them would take a vindictive satisfaction in cornering and annihilating the youth whose fists had disfigured them or their relatives or friends, their basic motive would be vengeance for his cruelty to a helpless girl.

Yes, they were justified. So was Steve, though it cut the thinker keenly that his best friend had turned on him. That very fact, too, showed him how strong must be the mob wrath now seething outside. Steve, he had to admit, would have been slow to take the war-path against him. Now that he had done so, however, he would be as implacable as usual. Yet Hard Wood realized that he himself could not shoot Steve, not even in self-defense. Steve had been too good a pal.

Far more important than any of these considerations, however, was the glorious new vision which so recently had flashed upon him. To stay and battle his enemies would be to cast away all hope of ever attaining the actuality of that dream. For the first time in his life he must sneak away from a fight. And, now that he had thought out the matter, he did not care. Indeed, he chuckled.

"Hard!" came a whisper from the couch. "What be ye goin' to do?"

Jane now was sitting up, and the faint sheen of the tiny fire revealed the anxiety in her face.

"Tell ye later," he replied, low-voiced. "Wait till I git this cookin' done."

By the time it was done the cavern was dusky, and outside the shades of night were growing more dense. Leaving his lantern unlighted, he laid on the fire another small stick to furnish the vague illumination necessary for movement. Then, as usual, he put into her lap his plate, heaped high; gave her a spoon, and set beside her a cup of fresh water. While she ate, he whispered what she needed to know of his plan for escape.

"We'll have to move slow an' patient, an' not say a word, till we git clear," he concluded. "Then it'll be easy. Mind, now, that ye don't forgit. Now don't say nothin' more. When ye've et, put on the shirt an' overhauls. An' then lay down an' rest while ye can."

While she ate, he unrolled from a corded bundle the overalls of which he had spoken, and, with his knife, shortened the legs to an approximate fit for her. In one of the remnants he wrapped up the packet of Cooper money, tying it with cord; and then, with a huge blanket-pin, he fastened it securely inside his shirt. With a short piece of rope he then made a gun-sling. Finally he strapped on his cartridge-belt. He was ready.

Squatting near the fire with back turned to her, he devoured his own meal. When it was finished she had donned the masculine garments and was lying down. He stepped quietly toward her, found her discarded dress, and folded it up. For a moment he stood still, frowning; then moved to her little clothing-roll and drew from it the fateful flowered dress which had brought her here. This also he folded, then wrapped up in the other one. Both were tucked inside his shirt and the shirt securely buttoned.

"Be we a-goin' now?" she breathed.

"Nope. Lay quiet. The moon ain't up yit."

And he filled his pipe and sat down.

Presently something occurred to him. Chuckling, he got a stub pencil and a fragment of paper; wrote a few words; laid the paper in the big empty tobacco-tin; placed the tin, with lid opened, near the fireplace; and resumed his patient waiting.

His pipe went out, and he did not refill it. His wee fire died, and the cavern became black. From the crest of the precipice came no sound; but he knew Steve was there. From across the room sounded soft, regular breathing. Jane had fallen asleep.

Through the rift overhead he watched the stars creep slowly westward. It seemed that the moon—a late, waning moon—would never come. But at length it did. The sky grew brighter, and down through the opening fell a vague sheen which enabled his dark-dilated pupils to discern dimly the outlines of his surroundings.

Rising, he slipped his gun-sling over his head. Noiselessly he stole across to Jane. A light touch and a whispered word roused her. She took his hand, arose, and followed him.

Without a sound, they passed slowly to the split at the rear, the emergency exit which he knew to be hazardous, but to which they now must trust. Feeling his way, he lowered himself into it. The first few feet of the passage, he remembered, were reasonably safe.

Inch by inch he worked downward, stopping at every foot to guide her after him. The moon gave no help here, and the passage was utterly black. Jagged rock tongues thrust upward from the bottom or outward from the sides. Rattlesnakes or copperheads might lie coiled to strike death into his legs. At any step a sudden slip might hurl them down a steep slope to a bone-breaking impact. Every movement must be cautious and gradual. They crept, crept, crept, with every nerve strained and with countless pauses.

At length his groping foot met nothing. Knowing that they must be down far enough to be lost to sight, he scratched a match. They were on the brink of a crevice, perhaps two feet across—wide enough to swallow them—and of unguessable depth. Picking his footing, he straddled the gap and lifted her across. They passed on safely; but thereafter he proceeded with even more caution, and at every doubtful spot he used a match. As never before, he realized the meaning of blindness.

WHEN, finally, he emerged into rocky débris faintly illumined by the moon, he gave a long sigh of thanksgiving. They were outside the passage, and he was weary from the strain. But they were not yet out of the woods, either literally or metaphorically. He unslung his rifle. With unrelaxed caution he then threaded the stones, took his bearings from the moon, now high in the eastern sky, and worked into the forest at the right. As ever, Jane responded to his every movement.

Holding his course straight eastward, he eventually reached a path. Dim and tiny though it was, it seemed a broad highway compared to the black passage and the bewildering brush. Turning northward, he advanced at better speed, though still observant of stones which might bruise Jane's toes.

"We're out o' the wust of it, mister," he said softly.

She laughed at the title.

"I bet I look awful funny into these pants, don't I?" she asked.

"Sh! Not so loud. No, ye look fine. If 'twarn't for yer hair ye'd be a boy."

A pressure of the hand answered. They trudged on.

The path was the one by which he had walked many a time to his home. Presently they stole out into his clearing, and he scanned everything searchingly. Possibly somebody, knowing his habit of visiting the grave, might be on watch there. But, if such watch was kept by day, it seemed to be withdrawn now. The hour was long past the usual Traps bedtime, and nobody could expect the wanted man to come here so late. They reached the road without a challenge.

"Now," he said, after a quick survey in both directions, "I'm a-goin' to make a boy of ye. Push up all yer hair an' squeeze it tight. Ye're a-goin' to wear my hat."

Obediently she piled her golden tresses high and pressed them down. On her head he put his battered old felt, pulling it low. The crown, hitherto dented in, now swelled as if about to burst from the pressure of her concealed hair. But the headgear completed the disguise afforded by the floppy overalls and the over-big shirt. Nobody spying the pair now would be likely to suspect her sex.

"Good 'nough, mister," he chuckled. "Now we've got a good long walk ahead of us, but it'll be easy. In to the road, all the way. When we git up yender a piece ye can rest awhile. Till then, don't talk or stop—'less'n ye feel me stoppin' quick."

At an easy gait he swung away, walking now abreast of her. He knew they were leaving tracks behind them, but for that he cared nothing. If they passed undetected through the night, tomorrow could take care of itself.

Steadily they swung along under the moon, treading in soft sand which stretched out ahead in winding, beckoning curves. Cool night breezes played around them, and from empty fields throbbed the monotonous melody of the crickets. A house crept up to them and faded away behind, black-windowed, silent, wrapped in sleep. Another came to them, and at this one a dog barked; but no human voice rang after them. At intervals appeared other dwellings. In one burned a light. Hard slowed, shifting his gun a little forward. But then through an open window sounded the wail of a fretful babe, and he glimpsed a night-gowned woman moving about. He resumed his regular pace.

Through alternate shine and shadow they passed, the road being darkened at times by overhanging trees, while at other times drifting clouds wiped out the moon. At length the road forked. Bearing to the left, he went on for a short distance in order to pass beyond sight of another house. When it was lost behind roadside bushes he halted.

"We'll rest now," he announced. "Lay right down into the road. It's clean sand, an' dry. There's a heavy dew into the grass."

She needed no second invitation. Down she went, to lie and relax every muscle.

"Oh, I'm tired!" she sighed.

"So'm I. But we're out o' the Traps now. We're onto the Rock Hill road, an' bimeby we'll git to Kyserike, 'less'n I'm mistook. I've heard tell that this road goes there."

"Kyserike? Where's that? What is it? Why be ye goin'——"

"Sh! Listen!"

Silence. Then a faint thudding sound. He seized her hand, pulling her up.

"Git up! Foller me, quick!"

They moved fast into a near-by brush patch. The thudding sounded a little nearer. Around the next bend came a horse, a wagon, a couple of late riders. The horse pounded slowly past. A gruff remark from one man evoked a sleepy grunt from the other. They were gone. Listening a little longer, Hard heard a dog bark to the southward. He laughed. That horse and wagon would obliterate many of the tracks left by the fugitives.

Resuming their way, they kept going with no more halts for rest. Mile after mile crawled endlessly past. The moon reached the zenith and began to float westward. The damp chill of late night, harbinger of gradually approaching dawn, crept over the earth. Still they plodded on, unspeaking, steadily putting one foot before the other.

Finally he paused again, surveying a dark cluster of house-roofs ahead and sniffing the air. The damp odor of a waterway assailed his nostrils. He nodded, glanced around, and nodded again.

"We're there," he announced. "Now ye can take a good rest."

"Thank the Lord!" She drooped wearily against him. "Where?"

"Over here. Come on."

Through a set of bars he led her, and into a close-cropped field where heaps of hay, canvas-capped for protection against possible showers, glimmered ghostly under the moon. Toward the rear of this they trudged. There he pulled off a hay-cap, kicked the hay loose, and bade her—

"Lay down an' take a nap."

Guided by his hand, she crept into the hay. He drew the canvas over her, stepped to the next pile, and sat down with his back against it.

The moon grew pale. The stars faded. Dawn came. Cocks crowed. The sun rose, shot level beams athwart the hills and hollows, began to roll up the blue heights of heaven.

Perhaps that lusty morning sun, looking down on the changes wrought in the night, laughed at what its light revealed. In a hayfield on the edge of Kyserike town it saw a flattened hay-cap, from beneath which peeped dusty toes; and, leaning against the next pile, a lean young mountaineer whose belt bristled with cartridges, whose lax hands held a rifle, whose ears were subconciously alert for any sound of stealthy footsteps—yet who was totally unaware of the fact that a large fly was jauntily promenading his nose.

And, miles to the south, it saw another young mountaineer climb into a cranny among huge rocks, warily scout into a cavern, pick up a tin box, stare at a paper within, and hurl it furiously against the cliff; a mountaineer who had gone supperless, sleepless, breakfastless, only to find a trap empty of its prey, a tobacco box empty of tobacco, and a message which read:

> Good By Steve, put this in yore Pipe and Smoke it.

CHAPTER XX

A DREAM COMES TRUE

A CANAL-BOAT, Hudson-bound, carried two brothers at whom its crew sneaked frequent curious glances. The elder, a stalwart, stony-faced fellow with a shock of black hair and a fine rifle, squatted most of the time with gaze ranging forward. The younger, and smaller, lay listlessly on the deck and dozed beside his kinsman. Virtually nothing could be seen of his face, for he wore a big hat pulled far down, and his eyes were voluminously bandaged by a huge bandanna. The observers could note, however, that his jaw was beardless, his lips delicately curved, and his hands and feet strikingly small. All other physical details were obscured by hat, handkerchief, and clothes considerably too big for him.

They had come aboard at Kyserike, the big fellow—who called himself Hardy—explaining to the captain that they wanted a lift to Kingston, where he meant to see a doctor about his brother's eyes. This brother, whom he called Jake, had met with an accident, the exact nature of which was left unspecified, and had to reach a good doctor at once. The captain, a rough chap with a heart as big as his fists, had forthwith invited them to come along gratis. And now they were well on their way.

The older one was extremely taciturn, the younger absolutely dumb. So the others had to restrain their curiosity and content themselves with surmises. The impassive manner and natural reserve of the tall one, coupled with his thick black hair and high cheekbones, led them to conclude that he was partly Indian. His clothes and his accent were those of a hillbilly, but his rifle and belt were not. He had something stowed away inside his shirt, but nobody could decide what it was. Together, the pair formed a mild mystery;

especially when an observer noted the huge fists of the one and the dainty hands of the other. Brothers?

It was the jovial captain himself who voiced something of this. He had a habit of noticing men's hands, perhaps because he could swing a wicked pair himself on occasion. At a quiet stretch of the creek, where there was nothing to do, he loafed along with:

"By thunder, you two fellers don't look much alike, do yuh? Put a petticoat on Jake, thar, an' yuh'd have a woman. Haw, haw! Ain't runnin' off with some other feller's gal, be yuh?"

Jake started, and his jaw reddened. His brother's pupils became pin-points. But not a muscle of his face changed. Quietly he said—

"Keep still, Jake."

And then, to the captain:

"Better not say nothin' like that when Jake can see ye, mister. It makes him madder'n a hornet to be called a gal. He takes after his mom in his looks. I'm built like my pop. But le' me tell ye, mister, the boy can handle himself when he's right. Only for his eyes bein' bad, he'd climb ye so quick ye'd think a bobcat had dropped onto ye."

"Haw haw!" roared the captain, tickled at the thought of being attacked by the boy. "Ain't some o' these younkers reg'lar banties, though! I've seen 'em like that myself. They'll spit into a b'ar's eye if he waggles his tail the wrong way—an' darn nigh drownd him, too, 'fore he knows what they're up to. Haw haw haw! Wal, Jake, old feller, don't git mad at me. I didn't mean nothin', an' I hope yuh'll git yer eyes doctored neat an' fine. Oh, ther's one thing I wanted to tell yuh, mister. 'Fore yuh git to Kingston yuh'd better put them ca'tridges in yer pockets an' unload yer gun. They're kind o' fussy over thar. P'liceman might git nosey."

"Thank ye." Hardy made no move, however, to act on the advice. After a minute or so the captain moved away.

Along the squirming Rondout voyaged the boat, leaving it from time to time for the canal and the locks, then resuming its creek journey. High Falls was passed, and Creek Locks, and Eddyville, and the last leg toward Rondout town was begun. The Hardy brothers ate bread and cheese from a package produced by the tall one—bought in Kyserike—but seemed to talk hardly at all. And at length Rondout was reached.

Here the pair departed, following the directions of the captain for reaching Kingston. Rondout was a rough town, of crooked streets and more crooked ways; but the early evening light still was good, the saloons were not yet running full blast, and the Hardys met no trouble. Hand in hand they walked on, followed by curious stares but by nothing worse. The older brother's formidable physique discouraged any thought of rowdyism.

In the dusk they entered Kingston. And there they vanished; one temporarily, the other permanently. A deserted shed swallowed them up, and Jake never came out. The older Hardy did, wearing a hat now, and minus his cartridge-belt. He leaned negligently against the corner for a time, then returned inside. When he reappeared he was leading a fair-haired girl, dressed in a worn blue frock. Jake Hardy, of the masked face and the floppy overalls, never was seen again.

WITH his new companion's hand locked in his, the tall fellow moved on. Now and then he questioned a passerby. Eventually the pair ascended the steps of a mansion set in a large yard where stood iron dogs and deer. With the muzzle of his rifle the man knocked on the door, chipping off some white paint.

A second laceration of the barrier brought a shrewish-looking maid, frowning because the bell had not been pulled. She frowned all the more when she viewed the poorly dressed pair.

"What you want?" she snapped.

"I want to see Mister James B. Thornton," growled the tall one, resenting her tone. "An' I want to see him right away."

The maid glowered. He glowered back at her. Then she caught the glint of the rifle-barrel hanging beside his leg. With a sudden gasp she shoved the door almost shut. Almost shut—but not quite. The rifle had darted forward and blocked it.

Then the door jumped violently open, propelled by the stranger's full weight. The stranger leaped in, his face a thundercloud. To the maid, who had staggered against an ornate hat-rack, he roared—

"Git Mister Thornton an' git him now!"

With a squeal, she fled. He reached out, caught the girl's hand again, drew her inside; shut the door, and set his back against it. From somewhere within came the maid's cry:

"He's got a gun! He's after Mr. Thornton! Get the police——"

"Norah!" broke in a stern masculine voice. "What's this rumpus? Stop screaming, d'ye hear? Now what is it?"

"A ragged villain with a gun—he's after you to kill you, Mr. Thornton, don't go near him!"

"Bosh! I'll go near him, all right! Quiet, now."

A heavy, determined tread sounded. A heavy, determined man loomed in the hall. A heavy, determined voice demanded: "Well, sir! What's this?"

The ragged villain straightened and smiled slightly. James B. Thornton was a man after his own heart, a square-jawed, powerful-looking man whose keen gray eyes were utterly fearless. Those eyes had swept over him, the gun, and the girl, in one rapid survey, and now were again centered on his own.

"Mister Thornton, was you blind a year ago?"

The master of the house looked puzzled. "I was, yes. Why?"

"Then ye're the man I want to see. My name's Harry Wood, an' I'm from over yender, into the hills. This gun ain't got nothin' to do with my comin' here, an' I don't mean ye no harm. What I want to see ye 'bout is—this."

He nodded sidewise toward the girl, pointed expressively toward his own eyes, and shook his head. Thornton's brows lifted. He looked again, thoughtfully, at the wide blue orbs which, though steadily directed toward him, did not quite meet his gaze.

"I see. Well, come in."

He led the way into a luxuriously furnished room lined with books, where a large lamp burned on a broad table and a thin haze of cigar smoke hung in the air. With a gesture he indicated a deeply upholstered chair, to which Hard guided Jane. When she was seated the light fell full on her face, and for a moment Thornton studied her keenly. Hard remained standing, his hands now unconsciously turning his hat around. He had left his gun outside in a corner.

"I run acrost a piece into a paper 'bout ye, quite a while ago," he explained. "A Kingston paper, 'twas, an' I got it into Kyserike. Paper said ye'd been to Noo York city and got an operation that made ye see fine. Said ye'd been blind quite a while, 'long o' gittin' throwed onto yer head when a hoss run away with ye. Said this here furrin doctor done somethin' to yer head an' give ye back yer eyesight. That right?"

"About right. Well?"

"Wal, jest lately I got to thinkin' 'bout it ag'in. Jane, here, got hurt in to the head when she was little, an' she ain't seen much since then. But there's times when she can see for jest a minute. Couple o' days ago, now, she tumbled an' bumped her head onto a rock, an' when she got up she could see me plain. 'Twas only for a second or so, an' then she went blind ag'in. But what I'm a-wonderin', mister, is— Could that doctor o' yourn fix her, d'ye s'pose, so's she could git her eyesight an' keep it?"

With a little cry of astonished joy, Jane half rose from her chair. Both men looked into her pathetically eager face. Thornton opened his lips, closed them, and reached absently to a tray containing a smoldering cigar. At this he puffed several times before replying, his gaze still resting on the tense girl.

"Well, I don't know. If anybody can, he can. Of course, there's some cases that can be cured and some that can't. But I know what he did for me: I was stone blind two years before he got hold of me. And if he could do that for me, I don't know why he couldn't fix up this little lady. But, you know, he's in New York, not here."

"Uh-huh. But he'd come up here, wouldn't he, for pay?"

"No," decidedly. "Folks have to go to him. He has more work than he can do. And he charges a pretty stiff price, too."

The eager hope fled from Jane's face. Despondently she sank back in her chair.

"Wal," countered Hard, "there's ways o' gittin' to Noo York, I s'pose. An' 'bout the price—how much did he charge ye?"

"About a thousand."

Hard's heart sank. But he battled on.

"Wal, s'posin' he got most of it, wouldn't he trust a feller awhile for the rest of it? This gal's eyes have got to be fixed, mister! An' I've got eight hundred dollars, an' I can work to git more."

Thornton stared. His gaze slid again over the ragged clothing of the hillman.

"You've got eight hundred dollars?" he blurted.

"I've got it, mister—got it right onto me now. An' if he'll only give her back her eyesight I'll earn the rest of it."

Once more Thornton glanced at Jane, who now had turned in amazement toward Hard.

"WELL, sir! I shouldn't be at all surprized if your eight hundred would be plenty—more than plenty. Doctor Hamilton—he's not a foreigner, by the way, but an American who studied a long time in Europe—Doctor Hamilton is a good-hearted chap, and if he felt there was hope of a cure he wouldn' let a few dollars stand in the way. He'd charge me a thousand because he knows I can stand it; but in a case like this——

"Hum! Tell you what I'll do, Mr.—er—Wood. Mrs. Thornton and Dorothy, that's my daughter, are determined to do some shopping in New York, and I'd just as soon go along with them. If you like, we'll take your—er—sister right down with us, and I'll see the doctor personally. He'll probably pay more attention to me than he would to you. What d'you think of it?"

Hard grinned widely. Then his eyes narrowed in sudden wariness.

"Ye're a stranger to me, mister," he pointed out.

"Quite true." Thornton looked quizzically at him, but took no offence. "But you can ask anybody here in town about me, and— Dorothy! Come here a minute."

"All right, father," responded a clear voice. Somebody romped down the stairs. A buxom, wholesome-looking girl, of about Jane's age, entered the study.

"Dorothy, I've decided to go to New York with you and mother——"

"Oh! Goody!"

"—and maybe you'll have a companion on the way down. This is Jane Wood, and she needs to see Doctor Hamilton."

Quick comprehension and sympathy darted across Dorothy's expressive face.

"Oh! Howdy-do, Jane. We'll be awf'ly glad to have you with us, and I'm sure Doctor Hamilton will do you lots of good. When do we go, father?"

"As soon as you can be ready. To-morrow, perhaps."

"I'm ready now!" laughed the girl. "I'm always ready for a trip to New York."

"All right. We'll see what mother says. That's all, for now."

With a nod and a smile Dorothy withdrew. Her father glanced at Hard.

"Satisfied?" he asked.

"Yep."

"And if you want to give me the money now, I'll give you a receipt showing just what it's to be used for. You understand that I don't guarantee that Doctor Hamilton can cure this case. But I do guarantee that every penny of your money will be accounted for and everything possible will be done for your sister. Fair enough?"

Hard looked him square in the eye, then reached inside his shirt.

"I'm trustin' ye, mister. An' I'm 'bliged to ye. Ye can gimme that receipt. An' I'll be comin' back later on to find out how things go. Jane, ye want to go to Noo York, don't ye?"

"Oh, Hard! I'll go anywheres—I'll go through anything—if there's a chance!" Low, vibrant, her voice shook with the intensity of her feeling.

His hand came out with the overalled package of notes, and he stepped to the table. Unwrapping the bills, he counted them out—seven hundred and eighty-seven dollars. Then from a pocket he produced thirteen dollars more. They were the last remnant of his own money, earned by millstone work.

"Correct. Eight hundred," approved Thornton. Seating himself, he rapidly wrote a receipt, reading aloud as he penned the lines:

"Received from Mr. Harry Wood eight hundred dollars to be devoted to surgical and other care of Miss Jane Wood——"

"Cooper," interrupted Hard.

"Cooper? Oh, Miss Jane Cooper. Hum! Of Miss Jane Cooper, as—er—directed by Dr. Leonard Hamilton of New York. Any part of this sum remaining after said surgical attention to be refunded to—" he paused.

"Miss Jane Cooper," prompted Hard.

"Miss Jane Cooper. Right. Signed, James B. Thornton. All right, sir."

Pocketing the receipt, Hard replied grimly:

"It'll have to be all right. If it don't come out all right I'm a-goin' to see Doctor Hamilton myself—an' I won't leave my gun into the hall, neither. Wal, Jane, I'll be a-goin'. But—uh—I brought 'long yer pretty dress—the one we kind o' disagreed 'bout, an' here 'tis. Ye can wear it to Noo York. G'by."

From under the shirt he drew the sadly rumpled flower-dress. Dropping it into her lap, he stepped hallward. A cry halted him.

"Hard!"

She sprang up, her arms outstretched, her lips aquiver, her eyes raining sudden tears tears of mingled joy and sorrow. Gropingly she reached toward him. When his fingers met hers she clasped both hands tightly over them.

"Hard, where be ye goin'?"

"I dunno. Anywheres—'ceptin' back to the Traps. I've got to leave ye. Ye'll be better off without me now. Jest keep on bein' brave, an' everything 'll be awright.

"I—I ain't sayin' g'by, Hard. Ye're jest an angel! An' no matter what 'comes o' me, I ain't never goin' to forgit ye, Hard—never!"

The hands unlocked, but went swiftly up his arm. They clasped again around his neck, and her face turned up to his. He crushed her to him. Their lips met and clung. Then they drew apart, dazed from the wonder of that embrace.

"Good luck go with ye, Janie!" he murmured huskily.

Slowly turning, he passed into the hall, mechanically picked up his rifle, and went out. The door closed softly behind him. Thornton lowered his gaze from the ceiling, in which he had, all at once, become tremendously interested.

Penniless, homeless, and hungry, Hard Wood stalked away through the shadows, a stranger in a strange land, outlawed from the harsh hills where he had grown, knowing not where to lay his head; yet filled with an intoxicating fire and a giant strength. The dream which had so suddenly arisen in his cavern was true. Nothing else mattered. As he passed on through the night, he trod an enchanted land wherein he was wondrously happy and content.

CHAPTER XXI

MOONSHINE MAKES SUNSHINE

AGAIN Hard Wood began to drift. His drifting now, however, was not the aimless wandering of the bygone spring. He drifted primarily because he thought of nothing else to do, but still with a definite aim—to see a little more of the world and to make a little money while seeing it. The canal, which once before had fascinated him, now called to him again. It offered him travel, change of scene, rough fellowship, food and lodging, and dollars.

He could, of course, have gone back to the Traps and made his peace; for he had the Thornton receipt to prove what he had done with his captive. But this he would not do. He would not give the men who hounded him the satisfaction of an explanation. Let 'em cuss and sweat and stub around in the rocks, and maybe get snakebit! Good enough for 'em!

Moreover, the impelling call which once had summoned him back hillward from the canal was silent now. Then, with his inconsolable grief heavy on his mind, he had felt a vague alarm lest some calamity befall his mother's treasures. Now he knew that there were no treasures, except the old wedding-dress and his father's muzzle-loading gun; and for these he felt no anxiety, since he knew Steve would not harm them. As for the meager furnishings of his cavern, he cared nothing about them. And, finally, the mere thought of living again in that hole among the rocks repelled him. What had been sweet solitude would now be empty loneliness.

Since a man who is hungry and broke can hardly dawdle in finding means of eating, Hard lost no time in landing a green hand's job. And, since the boat to which he attached himself happened to be leaving at once for the long upstream voyage, he was gone from Rondout before the Thornton household had finished its breakfast over in Kingston. So he did not see Jane depart for New York. Perhaps it was as well, for he might have been hurt. Having given her that ill-fitting but treasured flowery dress about which had revolved such a storm, he thereafter pictured her arrayed in it, supremely happy in its undisputed possession and in the hope of regaining her vision. As a matter of fact, she did not wear it at all.

After one glance at the wardrobe of the girl who was to travel with them, Dorothy and her mother had exchanged smiles; and presently Dorothy had driven her light carriage to certain stores, whence she returned with sundry purchases—all charged to her personal account. And the Jane who started for the metropolis was not the Jane of the Traps. She was a young lady fetchingly gowned, daintily stockinged and shod, and crowned by a little hat of the sunbonnet type which framed her face so winsomely that many a traveler stole frequent admiring glances at her. The garments all were inexpensive, yet not too cheap, and so skilfully selected that they seemed made for her. They were her first real "store clo'es."

Yet the flowered gown traveled with her, for she insisted on carrying it to the great city; insisted, too, that it must be the first thing she would look at if she gained her sight.

"I know it's got flowers onto it," she naively explained, "'cause I was told so. An' I ain't never seen a flower—not to remember—an' I love 'em! I've felt of 'em many's the time, an' of this cloth too, an' wished—oh, so hard—that I could jest see 'em once. An' then there's—there's other things 'bout this dress that ye mebbe wouldn't understand, so I won't tell ye."

Mother and daughter looked pityingly at her. And said Mrs. Thornton:

"You shall have it, my dear—and real flowers too. But the prettiest flower you're ever going to see is your own face."

So Jane sailed away southward, and Hard drifted away southwestward, and for a long time they knew nothing more of each other.

At its own leisurely pace, the blunt craft whereon the young hillman made his temporary home crept up the meandering Rondout and through the locks. At High Falls, where it stopped for a time to discharge part of its miscellaneous cargo, he scanned the faces of idling men on shore, involuntarily seeking among them that of Uncle Eb; for this town was the weekly destination of the white-haired man and his white-haired horse, and Hard had heard him speak often of watching boats take the locks. But then he realized that the wounded old fellow was not yet in condition to ride.

He wished now that he had asked Steve how Uncle Eb was progressing, and even thought of writing a note of inquiry and mailing it here. Realizing the foolishness of this, however—for such a move would only reveal his present whereabouts, and a reply would be exceedingly slow in coming—he did nothing of the kind.

On his next stop at High Falls, though, he made casual inquiries at a couple of stores and thereby acquired the desired information. Uncle Eb had not recently visited the town, but a "dark-complected feller" had driven the Wilham wagon in and bought a number of things. This fellow, whom Hard judged to be Steve, had said Mr. Wilham was laid up with "roomytiz," but was getting better.

BETWEEN these two calls at High Falls, Hard lost his first job but found a better one. The exchange was due to what his first captain considered a social error. It occurred at Ellenville, a town snuggling in a narrow valley two thousand feet below the western heights of the Shawangunks. Here the captain, a loose-lipped man whose ideas of pleasure consisted mainly of whisky and women, offered to "show the town" to his recruit.

The showing comprised a saloon, where the Trapsman sampled some bad liquor and declined to take more, and a shady resort where he declined to sample anything. Thereupon an extremely short-skirted lady called him a name and his doughty captain called him another. The lady received in return a slap in the mouth, and the captain a punch in the jaw. By the time the ensuing riot was over, the place and several of its habitués—including the captain and the official bouncer—were quite thoroughly wrecked.

Emerging then into a rough-and-ready crowd which had rapidly collected to see "a tough guy cleanin' out the Eel Pot," the disheveled young warrior met a constable who desired to arrest him for disturbance of the peace. A set of skinned knuckles collided so forcibly with the peevish officer's chin that peace was straightway restored to him—the calm peace of unconsciousness. This occurrence delighted the assembled boatmen and other water-fronters beyond measure. Hard returned to his boat not only unhindered, but followed by joyous whoops of acclaim; and the constable, when at length he revived, was so pointedly advised to forget it that he went in the other direction without delay.

When the dilapidated captain limped back on board he found himself confronted by the necessity of paying his punisher the wages due to date, under penalty of being used as a mop for his own deck. He did so. Then Hard departed to a neighboring boat, found its master aboard, and, by virtue of the experience acquired during his voyage thus far, got a new job at better pay. And his erstwhile boss, after salving numerous lacerations, sought another deck-hand more conversant with the niceties of social intercourse.

On his second boat Hard found a more congenial employer, and with that boat he stayed. Cap'n Davis was a quiet, frugal, shrewd fellow whose wanderings and observations had extended far beyond this canal and whose favorite pastimes were checkers and "high-low-jack." He asked few questions, and Hard, or Hardy, as he still called himself, was uncommunicative. Yet they got on together famously, and during the older man's occasional talkative moods the younger caught many a glimpse of places and people beyond the hills and noted many an odd truth concerning life in general.

One of these observations lingered long in his mind. It corroborated an assertion once made by Uncle Eb, but went far deeper; and somehow it comforted him mightily. Davis had just been discussing two brothers whom he had known, one of whom was altogether manly, while the other was bestial.

"And the old folks," he added, "were the finest people you'd ever want to know, and they done their best to bring up both the boys right. It's funny, how the good crops out in some and the bad in others. But I believe it goes away back in families; the father and the mother ain't the only ones that make a child. The great-grandfathers and the great-great-great-grandmothers can live over again in people sometimes. What I mean is, a man may not look, or think, or be, anything like either of his folks. He may be the livin' image, body and mind, of some great-great-grandpop that's been forgot for a hundred years. And that old feller that he takes after might have been a saint or he might have been a hellion. Understand what I'm drivin' at?"

Hard nodded slowly, adding—

"I never thought o' that, but I guess ye're right."

"Most folks never do think of it, Hardy. Most folks can't see anything but what's right in front of their eyes—and a lot can't even see that much. Lots of men, now, have left their wives for havin' a baby that didn't look anything like 'em. And chances are that those women were good as gold, and the babies were honest come by. They looked like somebody in the family, maybe on the father's side, maybe on the mother's that nobody knew about. And prob'ly they had the same qualities in 'em. The things that are born in us, Hardy, have got to come out, whether our folks had 'em or not."

Hard pondered long over this. Later on he harked back to the subject.

"S'posin' this," he suggested. "S'posin' there's a man an' woman that have five young ones, an' the man's bad, an' all his boys are bad as he is, or wuss. An' s'posin' the last one that's borned is a gal. An' she's brought up 'mongst 'em, 'mongst a murderin', sneakin' mess o' 'shiners an' house-burners an' so on. Can that gal be real good? Ain't she bound to have some o' them bad things into her?"

"Yes. No," asserted Davis. "She can be real good and she don't have to have any bad. Mostly it ain't so, I'll admit. Most youngsters take right after their father and mother. But not all of 'em. That gal, now, she might jump back in family history to some lady that was a livin' angel, and be real decent and fine. And all the bad that was around her wouldn't change her; it would only make the good in her all the stronger, because it would disgust her with the bad.

"You ain't got any idea, Hardy, how strong the goodness in a real good woman is. You've got to live and learn before you can appreciate it. And if that goodness is born in her it don't make any difference what the rest of her folks are. If I knew a woman like that and I liked her and wanted her, I wouldn't care if her father was Judas and her mother was Jezebel. I'd go git her."

His questioner shot a quick look at him, but Davis showed no indication of suspecting that the hypothetical girl might be real. He proceeded to elaborate his argument at considerable length. But Hard paid little attention to his further remarks on that subject. In memory he was hearing again a soft voice saying:

"They was always cussin' an' talkin' rough, an' I didn't like it. I even used to put my head under the piller——"

AS HE traveled the long waterway, he saw plenty of women and girls in the towns, and more than one turned to look again at him. Some, indeed, made open advances. But he turned his own head for none of them. They seemed too shy or too bold, too awkward or too prim, too silly or too stuck-up and, one and all, too vain to attract him in the least. He was not aware that he was comparing them with any other girl, but he was quite well aware that they did not interest him.

Nor did the other town attractions for boatmen, saloons and gambling, hold any allurement for him. Not that he dodged saloons; but a couple of schooners of foaming beer were all the drink he cared for, and when he had downed them he went out. As for games, he found far more pleasure in pitting his cards or his checkers against Cap'n Davis than in staking money against the tricks of strangers. In fact, he was keeping a tight grip on his earnings. He might need them at some time in the future.

When at length he was once more in Rondout, he slicked up a bit and strode away to Kingston. For days a burning eagerness for news had been consuming him, eagerness not unmixed with misgiving. By this time Jane's fate must be settled. Would the Thorntons have news of joy, or— He refused to think otherwise. At his best gait he went to the Thornton place.

The house was closed.

Repeated poundings brought at last a surly old caretaker who said the family had left on the previous day for Albany, to be gone a week or more. No, they hadn't left any word. Yes, they'd been to New York. No, they didn't bring anybody back with them. And if any stranger came around here kicking the door like that again he'd get arrested.

Growling, Hard left. There was a grain of comfort in the fact that Jane had not returned with them, but it was too tiny to satisfy him. Why couldn't they have left some word? It was not until he returned to the boat and found Cap'n Davis reading a letter that it occurred to him to visit the postoffice. And Davis quashed that thought before he could act on it. Glancing up, he said:

"No mail for you. I asked. Don't s'pose you was expectin' any, anyhow."

Hard grunted and went to work on the cargo. In four days he was again afloat, crawling up the creek as before. Bitterly he repented not having learned Dr. Hamilton's address. Until he could locate the Thorntons, he must go ignorant of Jane's fortunes.

Weeks snailed away, and again he came into port. During that endless journey he had brooded much, imagining all sorts of evils befalling the girl alone in the vast city. On one point alone was his mind at rest: The character of the people to whom he had entrusted her. Despite his favorable judgment of them, he had taken the precaution, before first leaving Kingston, of asking a number of citizens concerning the reputation of James B. Thornton. The verdict had been unanimous: Thornton was absolutely square. Yet this did not answer the question now hammering at every fibre of his being. What had become of Jane?

This time he made no sartorial or tonsorial preparations for his call. Hardly had the boat tied up when he was off and away, traveling at a lope.

Again the house was closed.

Again he unearthed the caretaker. This time his manner was so fierce that the latter quailed. All the watchman knew was that the family had gone again. They were all the time making trips. He thought they'd gone to Massachusetts this time. They never left any word with him. All he was supposed to do was to keep the house safe. If Hard was expecting word, why didn't he go to the postoffice? Maybe Mr. Thornton had left a note there.

Having ascertained where the postoffice was, the ferocious visitor departed, much to the caretaker's relief. And, having reached the postoffice, he demanded mail in a tone that nearly dazed a somnolent clerk.

"Needn't knock a feller deaf," grumbled the latter. "Yes, there's somethin' for you. Been here so long we're sick of seein' it. Here y'are!"

Hard snatched the large envelop, bearing the name of James B. Thornton in bold type in the upper left corner, and the superscription: "Mr. Harry (Hard) Wood, Kingston, N. Y. Hold Until Called For." And, having grabbed it, he hesitated, turning it over and over.

He looked at the date, and started. This envelop had been waiting here for him at the time of his last visit. Davis was a liar, he hadn't asked——

Suddenly he realized that Cap'n Davis, knowing him as "Hardy," must have asked for mail so directed.

TEARING off the end of the container, he drew out a large folded sheet and a smaller envelop. The former, when straightened out, revealed the vigorous writing of Thornton. It read:

DEAR MR. WOOD:

I am leaving today for a short trip. This is posted to inform you of the outcome of Miss Cooper's operation in case you arrive in my absence. Dr. Hamilton's report to me is enclosed. I would suggest that his recommendations be followed.

Resp'ly yours,
JAMES B. THORNTON.

The enclosure, directed to Thornton, was written in the small, precise hand affected by secretaries in the days before the typewriter came into general use. This was the crucial news. Hard braced himself as he began to peruse it. It stated:

I take pleasure in informing you that the operation upon Miss Cooper gives every indication of being successful. Since her condition is one of long standing, however, I should like to keep her under observation for a time.

Mrs. Hamilton has taken a fancy to her and would like to have her remain in our home as an assistant in the care of the children. Miss Cooper seems desirous of accepting this offer. This will also enable me to keep informed as to her condition, and I have little doubt that her restoration will thus be made permanent. If this arrangment is agreeable to Mr. Wood, whom I understand to be her guardian, please inform me.

In view of the circumstances explained by you I will set the expense of the operation at $250. This includes everything. I trust that this figure will be satisfactory. With best personal wishes,

Your obedient servant.

The signature was a cryptic scribble, but sufficiently legible to permit the name "Hamilton" to be deciphered by one who knew what it should be.

Hard laughed joyously. The miracle had actually come about! The moonshine money so long hoarded in Old Bill's tobacco box had unlocked a door through which sunshine now was streaming into the life of his ill-used daughter. This letter did not say definitely that Jane had recovered her vision, but of course that was what it meant——

"Hey! Here's another letter for Harry Wood!" the hail of the clerk broke in. The rosy mist dissolved. This might be bad news.

The new envelop, recently mailed, was another of Thornton's. It enclosed, without comment, another note from New York. This message was definite. It stated that Jane's vision now was permanently restored, and that repeated tests showed it to be excellent.

Moreover, she was rapidly learning to read. She was remaining at the Hamilton home, where the children were devoted to her, and seemed very happy. In view of the facts that she had no relatives in a position to provide for her and that Mr. Wood apparently had disappeared, she would undoubtedly continue to reside with the Hamiltons.

The wanderer read it twice, his expression growing more and more sober. Then, noting the office address printed at the top of the sheet, he returned to the window. Having obtained paper and envelopes, he stepped to the designated writing-shelf, and there, curling his calloused fingers awkwardly around a scratchy pen, he addressed Dr. Hamilton as follows:

I just got yore Letters. I am awful Glad about Jane. She is her own Boss and can do what she likes about stayin to yore place. She has got $550 comin to her from you or Mr. Thornton. I ain't seen Thornton. If you have got that Money see that she gits it. Resply yores,

HARRY WOOD.

To Thornton he wrote a very similar note. Posting both, he lounged away toward the canal, his mood wavering between joy and gloom.

Somehow he felt curiously light, yet weary: as if a great load had been lifted from him, but had left him tired. Yes, moonshine had made sunshine for Jane, moonshine money and a moonlight journey through the night. It was wonderful that she now could see. It was even better that she was so happy and had found a new home with fine people. But now she would not come back. What had she to come back to? Nothing. No home, no friends. She would stay in the city, meet city fellows, marry one of them and have everything fine.

He was glad, mighty glad. She deserved all the happiness there was. Life had been cruel to her, and now she must have the pleasure to which she was entitled. Yes, he was glad.

But he moved with dispirited step, and on his flinty face was no smile.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CALL OF THE HILLS

GRADUALLY, yet all too rapidly, summer faded from the hills.

Dreamy days of sunshine were interspersed by others of fierce storm. The nights grew chill. Here and there along the slopes of the Shawangunks appeared tiny flecks of red, as if prankish Jack Frost had pricked the great green bosom of the mountains with an icy needle, drawing wee drops of blood. Then, almost over night, it seemed, the verdure paled, blushed, or turned to gold. Great banks of monotonous greenery became riotous with scarlet and crimson, yellow and brown, amid which only the conifers clung to their dusky hue. And out of the west and across the deep blue field of the heavens rolled the hordes of gigantic cumuli which, year after year, invariably march over the hills in autumn.

Floating along his winding watery road, Hard Wood noted the changes taking place upon the rolling hills at the eastward and the sterner steeps at the west. And now, for the first time since he had left them, the mountains began to call him back. Twinges of homesickness assailed him, although the uplands no longer held for him a home. More and more often he caught himself thinking of the cavern, wondering whether his abandoned possessions were safe—and then angrily asked himself what harm was likely to come to them.

Too, he thought more frequently of Uncle Eb's little yellow house, and of Steve, and even of the other Trapsmen who had unitedly sought vengeance on him. His enmity for those avengers had long since cooled, for he knew well that he had deserved their hounding. But not until now had he felt the slightest desire to go back among them.

The fact was that traveling in the lowlands had lost its savor. It was the same old story—up and down, up and down; canal and boats, mules and men, towns and cargoes. Excepting Cap'n Davis, he had no friends along the way. And, except for his few personal needs, he had no use for the money he was earning. Jane had more than plenty, there was nobody else for him to spend his savings for, and he was not inclined to throw them to the saloons and the harpies of the ports.

So far as Jane's finances were concerned, his mind now was at ease. At last he had succeeded in finding Thornton at home, and, from him, had received satisfactory evidence that the moot five-hundred-odd dollars had been deposited to Jane's account in a New York bank. Also, he had been informed of a fact which had not occurred to him: That Jane was receiving good pay for caring for the Hamilton children. Thus she not only had a home far superior to the one she had always known, but was paid to stay in it. Such luck could never befall a girl in the hills. There a waif could expect nothing more than bed and board, an occasional cast-off dress, and endless drudgery.

He had received indisputable proof, too, of the truth of Dr. Hamilton's last report. It was a miracle in itself—at least, it seemed so to him; for it was a letter from Jane, who, until this summer, had never seen a printed word. Inscribed with a pencil, in the childish hand of one first learning to write, it nevertheless was correctly spelled, though with erasures which might indicate that she had asked some one concerning words of whose orthography she was not yet certain. He read it and reread it for many days—until, in fact, it became a blackened tatter from oft-repeated handling. And this was what it said:

> DEAR HARD,
>
> This is my first letter. It is so good to be able to see and read and write. I have lots of flowers now and a cat and a bird that sings awful sweet, he is yellow, they call him Canary. They are so good to me here. They put the money into a bank for me, they say it's mine, but I won't touch it, it's yours. What shall I do with it? Where are you and what doing? You have been awful good, I want to see you so much, but I must stay here a while. Write and let me know everything. Good-by.
>
> Your friend,
> JANE.
>
> P. S. How old are you, about thirty?

"Think o' that, now!" admired Hard. "My, but she's bright! Writin' all that, all by her own self, so soon. But—gosh!—do I look like thirty year old?"

He did not. That is, not like the hillman of thirty. Yet that strongly delineated countenance of his was, at any time, as mature as that of many a city man of twenty-five; and in sterner mood, when its lines deepened, all youthfulness departed from it.

Moreover, though Jane once had seen him plainly, she was obviously unskilled as yet in judging ages from facial contours. Since Hard himself, however, was unfamiliar with the smooth-cheeked big-city type of face, he studied the question with mingled feelings.

His answer was typical: Brief, and unsparing of himself as he was unsparing of others. Laboriously he scrawled:

> DEAR JANE,
>
> I am awful Glad you are so Happy. The money is all yores. I stole it out of yore Attic. You dont owe me nothin.
>
> I am goin on to Twenty year old. I am workin on to the Round Out Canel. I ain't been back to the Traps and ain't seen nobody from there. You better stay in to the City. Hopin you will keep well.
>
> Yores truely,
> HARRY WOOD.

Since then, no reply had come from her; and, after a time, he drew his own conclusions from her silence. Now that she knew about the money, she did not feel that he had been so "awful good." And probably some of those slick city fellows were courting her now, and she was forgetting him. She had said she never would forget, but that meant nothing. Then she had been mad with joy and gratitude because of the prospect of deliverance from her black bondage. Now—things were vastly different now. She could not be expected to feel the same.

SO HIS set expression became a shade more somber, and his thoughts turned again to his hills, and he was half minded to go back to their craggy fastnesses. Also, there arose before his mind's eye the evil visage of Jerry—Jerry, whose own brother had implored enemies to shoot him like a rat. Perhaps Steve had attended to Jerry before now; but it was high time for Hard to find out.

Not that he had forgotten the hated Copperhead during his travels. He had piercingly scanned every red-headed man he met, and had followed two of them into saloons in order to make sure of them. But until now he had felt no impelling urge to reenter the Traps and hunt Copperhead down. In his present mood, however, the thought of a finish fight with his ancient enemy appealed strongly. It was hunting-time anyway, and perhaps the season itself aroused his Indian blood.

The final impetus toward the Traps came suddenly and unexpectedly. His boat was tied up at Kerhonkson—in those days known as "Port"—when he was hailed in crisp tones from the bank. There stood Parker.

"Come here!" commanded the officer. "I want yuh!"

For a frozen instant Hard stood dry-mouthed, staring at the indomitable fighter whom he had last seen herding Bill and Joe Cooper toward the penitentiary—just before he fired the Cooper house and abducted Jane. Then sounded the sleuth's jovial little chuckle.

"Come on!" he grinned. "I don't want yuh long. Maybe about ten minutes. I've got a guy I want yuh to look at."

"What for?" demanded Hard.

"Might be a friend o' yours. Red-headed feller. Or do yuh know where that one is?"

"Oh. No. I lost track of him."

"So have I," admitted Parker. "But seein' I don't know his face, and you do, s'posin' yuh come and look at this bird. I don't think he's the one, but I don't want to miss any bets."

Reassured, Hard went with him to inspect a sullen, sandy-haired prisoner guarded by Parker's new partner—a silent, phlegmatic officer much unlike either Parker or the deceased Roberts. The captive, who had been gathered in for smuggling illicit liquor, was a stranger to the Trapsman.

"Uh-huh. All right," Parker nodded carelessly. "But say, what are yuh doin' to earn that gun I lent yuh? Thought I told yuh to go git that Jerry feller, didn't I?"

"Yup. But I've been a-workin' outside to git me some money," drawled the hillman. "I might be goin' back into the mountains pretty soon, an' I'll kind o' look 'round some more. About the rifle, mister, I'd jest as soon buy it from ye."

"Aw, I ain't in the hardware business. Keep your money. But this Jerry feller hasn't showed up anywhere outside, as far's I know, so he must be up in the hills yet. Maybe he died somewhere, of course. But if he didn't, you go git him and bring him out, without mussin' up his hair or anything. Will yuh?"

"Mebbe. How's Bill an' Joe gittin' 'long?"

"Fine. Joe won't be away but a few years. Bill may not git back at all. He's got a long stretch, and some more comin' after that. I don't remember just what they got, but that's the way it lays. Say, what became of the girl?"

"She's bein' took care of by friends."

"Uh-huh. Good. The house caught afire, didn't it? I saw a lot o' smoke back there when I was drivin' out."

"Uh-huh. Somebody must of stepped on a match or somethin'. It went up awful quick."

"Uh-huh." Parker rubbed his chin and cocked an eye at the clouds. "Well, you go git Jerry. See yuh later, maybe. So long."

"G'by."

Hard chuckled on his way back to the canal, and Parker chuckled after he had gone. But that sudden meeting had crystallized the hillman's determination. And after one more visit to Kingston, which yielded no tidings from the south, he informed Cap'n Davis that on the next trip he would leave him at Kyserike. To this decision, despite all urgings to reconsider, he adhered. At Kyserike he quit. The next morning, with a pack of food on his back, the cartridge belt once more around his waist, and loaded rifle swaying in one fist, he swung out of the town and headed for the Traps.

He took the Rock Hill road, the road which, on that moonlit night which now seemed so long ago, had led him and Jane to safety. Openly, defiantly, he now trod it again in broad daylight, returning to the hills where men still cursed his name. Passing the little field where the dawn had found the fugitives asleep among the haycocks, he set his teeth a little harder; for its blank emptiness seemed to mock him. But he did not pause. After one glance at it he fixed his eyes ahead and kept them there.

The miles slid away behind him now far faster than on that night journey, for he had no blind companion to shorten and slow his stride. Occasionally he met some one who looked him over curiously, but none betrayed recognition. Nobody living on this highway had ever seen him before. It was not until he reached the Clove road, and had walked some distance along it, that he encountered any obstacle to his progress.

Then it appeared with surprizing quickness. From a house which commanded a good view of the road, but which had shown no outward sign of menace as he approached, erupted two men armed with shotguns.

HARD stopped short. His rifle-hammer clicked back, and the gun poised ready, though without definite aim, chest-high. He knew both these men—brothers named Rhodes, who had been neither friends nor enemies. Without preface the elder of the pair immediately hurled at him the question which for months had been tormenting the Traps.

Hey! What ye done with Jane Cooper?"

"What business is that o' yourn? Be you her guardeens?"

"We're a-makin' it our business! An' so's everybody else 'round here, an' ye'll darn soon know it! What's 'come o' that gal?"

Hard held his answer, scanning both with sardonic gaze. They had stopped well out of arm's reach, held their weapons tensely but with muzzles lowered, and, for all their truculence, were at heart afraid of him. He read it in their faces, in the speaker's haste to proclaim that "everybody" was with him in his demand, and in the fact that they had brought their guns. He laughed contemptuously. Yet he gave them the information which really was their due.

"Jane Cooper, ye poor fools, is into a safe place an' well an' happy. She's a long ways from here, an' into a fine home. That's all ye've got any business to know. An' the less ye meddle into her affairs the less liable ye are to git hurt."

"Huh!" grunted the younger brother. "We ain't takin' your word——"

"Ye'll have to. If ye can find a man that ever caught me a-lyin', bring me that man an' I'll show him proof. I've got plenty o' proof; got it right here into my pocket. But it'll take better men than you are to make me show it till I git good an' ready. Put that into yer pipe an' smoke it. An' one thing more—anybody that I hear about sayin' anything nasty 'bout that gal is a-goin' to git hurt bad. Man or woman. Ye can pass that word 'round."

The Rhodes blinked. Their preconceived ideas were severely jolted. Despite themselves, they felt that he was telling the truth; and, if he was, they were decidedly averse to incurring his lasting enmity. Their eyes fell to his rifle, the rifle which, they had heard, had been given him by a law officer. Somehow that officer's gun seemed to add the weight of authority to his blunt talk.

"Wal—" hesitated the elder Rhodes, "mebbe—uh—" He came to a full stop.

"That's 'nough," clipped Hard. "Nev' mind no more talkin'. Ye can go back into the house. But wait a minute. Is Jerry Cooper 'round here now?"

The pair started slightly. Again their gaze shot to his rifle.

"Why—uh—I jest hearn las' night that somebody thought they see him yesterday," replied one. "Said somebody that looked like him snuck into the brush nigh the Cooper road. Might be somethin' into it. I dunno."

"Thank ye." Hard smiled thinly.

Without another word or look he resumed his way, leaving them staring after him. As long as he was within earshot neither of them spoke again.

At the houses beyond he met with no interruption. No men seemed to be about. A couple of women stared at him, but refrained from speaking. Several children spied him and bolted into their houses to shriek the news of his return. A dog or two barked. But not a word was spoken to him —though many were spoken about him when he had passed. As soon as he was out of sight there began an excited clattering of female tongues.

Once more he entered his own clearing. It now was thigh-deep with uncut grass, above which rose only the gaunt chimney to mark the spot which once had been home. Beyond, the three full-bosomed maples had become lean and yellow. Toward them he trudged, and at the grave he paused. To his astonishment, he found it neatly trimmed.

A space of six feet all around the mound was mowed. And on the mound itself lay a withered bunch of late-blooming black-eyed Susans. Who had put them there, who had kept the grass cut, he could not know. But somehow his thoughts turned to Steve.

For a time he stood there, silent. Then he moved away into the woods. At length he halted again outside his cavern, listening. No sound came.

Unslinging his pack, he laid it noiselessly on a rock. Into the rift and through the hole he crept with equal stealth. At the end of the rock shelf he lay for several minutes, staring in new amazement.

The cavern was empty of life, but some one had been there and put it in order against his return. On a couple of small rock shelves now rested the ends of a birch pole, and from the pole hung several packages, suspended by ropes. All but one were corded bundles of cloth, bedding and clothes. The odd one was a small wood box, and he guessed that in it he would find the few food supplies which he had abandoned. Everything which could be damaged by squirrels or wood-mice had been hung beyond their reach. The cooking utensils, his ax, and his old gun stood against the farther wall in an orderly row. Everything was far enough in to be beyond the reach of any rain.

Somebody had known that, sooner or later, the hills would call him back.

CHAPTER XXIII

A COPPERHEAD COILS

FOR a day after the wanderer's return the Traps seemed deathly still.

He had come back on a Saturday, and, although no Trapsman was burdened by religious scruples, it was not the custom to work on Sunday. Wherefore the clink of steel on stone was stilled for thirty-six hours following the last sunset of the week, and throughout the succeeding day Hard heard only an occasional far-off cock-crow, a few explosions of hunters' guns, and such small noises as he himself or the other woods-dwellers created. Not even the sough of a breeze came to him, for the day was utterly windless. To a man whose ears had for months been accustomed to noises and voices, the silence seemed oppressive, ominous, as if the hills were holding their breath preparatory to hurling at him some annihilating calamity.

Night among the boulders was black and bleak. Day was wan and chill, a steely film across the sky turning the sun to a sickly disc devoid of warmth. In every way, the craggy Traps was receiving its returning foster-son with countenance cheerless and inhospitable. And the face he turned back to the Traps was no more warm or soft than its own.

Arising rather late—for, by supplementing his own blankets with the bedding taken from the Cooper attic, he had slept warmly, and the dayshine entering his cavern was too weak to arouse him early—he spent some time in making a big breakfast. Then, after working the action of his rifle a couple of times to make sure of its readiness, he buckled on his reserve ammunition and went forth to a fruitless day of prowling.

The stillness of the air and the lateness of the season made stealthy movement difficult; for fallen leaves lay everywhere, crackling loudly when trodden upon, and even on bare ground the sound of footfalls was audible. The slight crunch of gravel, the grate of stone against stone, the suck of mud in wet spots, all were telltales to any listening ear. A squirrel scampering among the dead leaves made a racket worthy of a full-grown man, and the tread of even a bird was noisy. Thus it was hardly the day for man-hunting. Nevertheless, Hard had come here to hunt, and he hunted.

Until he had crossed the road forming the now ineffective deadline, he moved with little caution. Thereafter he prowled as stealthily as a hunting panther. Every step was slow, careful, and as nearly soundless as possible. Again and again he started at some sudden rush among the leaves as small animals darted away. Two or three times he jumped as a grouse shot up with an abrupt thunder of wings; and on these birds he heaped silent maledictions, for he knew their precipitate flight would, if heard by Copperhead, put him instantly on guard. His advance was time-killing, nerve-straining work.

At length, however, he reached the Cooper clearing. It was bare. The corn had been harvested and carted off by thrifty Trapsmen who, with none to say them nay, had appropriated it for their cattle. Those same men, however, had not deemed it wise to cut the hay at Hard Wood's deserted field. A slight smile quirked his lips as he thought of this and surveyed the expanse of stubs.

Where the house and barn had stood were only a few charred fragments and the stump of a chimney whose top had collapsed. The once formidable lair of his enemies had become nothing. He wondered where the sole remaining malefactor of that tribe now was sheltering himself. It must be somewhere in the woods, for there certainly was nothing but desolation in this stark field. Perhaps, though, he had made some sort of hang-out in the split boulder where Hard, on that last day, had lost his powder flask. Toward that point moved the hunter, keeping always masked by the brush.

The rocks, too, were empty. So was the path beyond, where Jane had first come into the life of the youth now trying to trail her brother. Circling on beyond the little creek, Hard came to a cattle path leading farther back, and followed this into a small pasture. Nowhere was any sign of his quarry.

At last, with the wan sun sinking westward and hunger gnawing at his stomach, he abandoned the quest for the day. Returning northward, he detoured to the shelving rock where he had deposited his mother's treasure-chest. The chest still was there, streaked by slanting rains, but undiscovered and unharmed. Swinging back to the Cooper road, he went out as warily as he had come in. It was quite possible that his enemy had been outside and now was approaching. But he retraced his way to his cavern without meeting Copperhead or any other man.

On arriving at his den he looked and listened before entering, half expecting to see or hear Steve. The news of his open reappearance in the Traps must have traveled all about by now, and it would be strange indeed if the Wilham household had not heard of it. But Steve had not been here. The cavern was as its master had left it, and seemed colder and lonelier than ever.

So far as visible indications went, Steve and all the rest who had vowed vengeance on the young cave-man were now ignoring his presence and relegating him and his deeds to the realm of things forgotten. As a matter of fact, however, the mountain bowl was seething with the tidings of his coming. Except for two persons, the entire Traps clan had known of it before dark, and many a hot argument had ensued. The more virulent women of the place—notably the sniffling Mis' Becker—were vindictive in their verbal attacks on him and rancorous in their demands that the men now "give him his needin's." Some of the men were quite willing to try—if the rest would back them up. But the rest hung back.

The Rhodes brothers had lost little time in circulating their own budget of news, and most of the men who heard it were inclined to believe that Hard Wood had told the truth. For one thing, it was not his way to take refuge in lies. For another, his bold return was in itself a convincing argument. Considering everything, the majority was willing to go very slowly in calling for an accounting. There was a general feeling that before very long Uncle Eb Williams and Steve Oaks would have definite knowledge of the Jane Cooper matter, and that until then it was best to wait.

Moreover, the whisper had gone around that Copperhead Cooper was back, and that Hard Wood has asked about him and "grinned kind o' nasty" when told of his enemy's presence. Even the malcontents looked forward with pleasurable excitement to further developments in the Wood-Cooper war.

THE two who were tardy in learning of the event were Steve and Copperhead. Just at present Steve was assiduously hunting 'coons, whose fur now was becoming prime. Thus engaged, he and his mongrel dog had been away from home for the past two nights, hunting through the dark hours and sleeping by day in a little shelter known only to the huntsman. It was not until Sunday sundown that he reappeared, bringing several pelts, and heard the news.

It was at about the same hour that Copperhead received the tidings. Like his enemy, he had spent a bad day at hunting, hunting, however, not for a man but for something to eat. Like his foe, too, he now hunted with a rifle; not a repeater, but a single-shot arm which, with a leather pouch of cartridges, he had brought back with him from that unknown place whither he had fled from the "revenooers." During Hard's search for him he had been away on the Minnewaska tableland, vainly seeking game. And now, desperate from hunger, he had sneaked to the highway and was awaiting darkness. When that came, he meant to steal into Andy Mack's henhouse and snatch a couple of fowls from the roost.

He was a gaunt, savage Copperhead now. He was here only because this hole in the hills was his last refuge. Once before, a few days after deserting his brothers, he had come crawling furtively back, weak from hunger and a bullet-hole through one arm, to find his home destroyed. He had gone away again, dragging himself up over Minnewaska and then, by way of the great Palmaghatt ravine at the south, stumbling down into a tiny farm-town at the base of the mountains.

There, under an *alias*, he had been befriended by a kindly family—and in the end had repaid them as a copperhead might be expected to do. Now he was a fugitive, hunted for a crime far worse than moonshining, and lying very low. His miserable shelter was the ruined still, somewhere to the south of where his house had been. He was as yet unaware that he had been seen and recognized while dodging back into the brush two days agone, and he had no intention of making his return known to the Traps so long as he could avoid it. Until his trailers down in the valley should give up their search, he was hiding from the sight of all men.

With the silent patience of a true copperhead, and the same fierce concentration on the prospect of food, he lay behind a stone wall and awaited his time to strike. The twilight thickened into dusk. The fowls all were in their house, and, presumably, asleep. A little longer, and it would be dark enough for him to creep forward. But then came the slow thump of a horse's feet climbing the hill; a voice drawling "Whoa;" the sound of an opening door, and Andy Mack's voice in salutation.

"H'are ye, Pete. Any more news?"

"Jest a-goin' to ast ye the same thing, Andy. Thought mebbe ye'd seen Uncle Eb. I'd kind o' like to know what he's got to say. Folks is kind o' excited down b'low."

"Wal, Uncle Eb says, 'Leave Hard Wood 'lone.' An' I say the same, Pete. Uncle Eb ain't seen Hard yit, but he says if the boy says the gal's awright, that's good 'nough for him. 'Course, we'd all like to know jest what's what an' how come, but we can hold our hosses till it all comes out."

"M-hm." Pete expectorated thoughtfully. "Wal, that sounds sensible. I wouldn't wonder, though, if we had to wait while Hard gits to Copperhead Cooper an' kind o' squar's up his account. Hard's kind o' like Steve Oaks—ye don't want to git into his way when he's got somethin' onto his mind. Ain't seen Copperhead, I s'pose?"

"Nary a see. I dunno how he lives, 'less'n he shoots his vittles. Sort o' funny, him an' Hard gittin' back so clus together."

"M-hm. An' Hard with a rifle an' a hull pack o' grub, an' askin' right off 'bout him. Looks kind o' like he'd come jest to git him. 'Twon't hurt my feelin's if he does. Copperhead never was no good."

"I sh'd say not! Nor none the rest of 'em—'ceptin' the ol' woman an' the gal, o' course. An' that puts me into mind—I'm a-goin' to lock up the henhouse tonight. Don't want no skunks or weasels gittin' in, or no copperheads neither."

"Huh, huh, huh!" chuckled Pete. "I don't blame ye. I wouldn't trust Copperhead as fur's I can spit. Say, ye dunno where Hard's a-livin', do ye?"

"Same place, I guess. Over 'round Dickabar somewheres. I dunno jest where, an' I dunno as I'd tell if I did know. I think the boy's awright."

"M-hm. Wal, I'll go 'long. Don't forgit yer hens. Huh, huh!"

"By gorry, I won't. I'll lock 'em up this minute."

Pete chirped to his horse. The slow thumping recommenced. Before the beat died away up the hill, a metallic snap testified that Andy had put his padlock on the henhouse. The door of the dwelling squeaked once more. All was still.

Behind the wall, Copperhead crept away, mouthing vicious oaths. He'd get a hen at some other house. And Hard Wood was hunting him, was he—with a whole pack of grub—a hide-hole somewhere around Dickabar——

Copperhead stopped. His teeth suddenly bared like fangs. A pack of food, a hide-hole—just what he needed! A bullet in Hard Wood's back—ha!—then drop him down a crevice somewhere, nobody'd ever find him. And he, Copperhead, could hide and eat and sleep for weeks to come, maybe; for awhile, anyway.

So, though he venemously cursed Andy Mack and Pete and the bad luck which had made his presence known to the Traps, he grinned again and again. And within an hour he stole a hen from another roost and hastened with it to his refuge, where he half-cooked it and gnawed it down. Then, huddling beside his smoldering fire, he dozed, first gloating on his dream of revenge, then quaking with a new fear.

The thought came to him that possibly Hard Wood was now a law officer. Hard's last appearance within his sight had been as an ally of "revenooers;" the recently overheard conversation showed that he had been away for awhile; he might have had himself sworn in as a deputy for the express purpose of bringing his enemy to book. In that case his return now might indicate that he knew of Copperhead's recent crime; and other officers might follow him at any moment.

To the guiltily fearful fugitive this fancy speedily became fact. And, though he shivered and shook, he grew all the more desperately eager to assassinate Hard and seize his food before other law-hounds could come. It was his only hope.

Thus, though the day had been, to the hunter who now slumbered under the Dickie Barre cliffs, as featureless as an unruffled pool, its utter calm had been only on the surface; and under that superficial quietude had squirmed currents and eddies beyond his ken. And even now, while Hard dreamed and Copperhead twitched and Steve smoked thoughtfully in their various abodes, a new cross-current came sliding into the Traps bowl from outside.

Through the jaws of the Gap rolled a wagon containing two men, both armed. At the first house it paused while one of the riders made crisp inquiries. Then it crawled on, climbing the hill, to stop again at the home of Uncle Eb. Steve came forth. After a short conversation, the riders unharnessed, put the horse into the barn, and entered the house. And there, after a lengthy talk, Steve put a little oil on his gun and every one went to bed.

One of the newcomers was Parker. The other was a lantern-jawed, hard-eyed farmer—the constable of the tiny hamlet whence Copperhead had fled back to the Traps.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE CRAGS

COLD rain pounded the Shawangunks and swept away eastward, leaving behind it a clean sky and a soggy earth. Stars twinkled brilliantly in the dark blue heavens; paled, vanished, and made way for a glorious dawn. Dismal Sunday was dead; lusty Monday was born.

The creatures of earth and air sprang awake and bestirred themselves in preparing or seeking food. Two-legged or four-legged, winged or wingless, wild or tame, all turned their thoughts and their motions to that one end. The only animate things which did not were legless, loathsome creatures lying torpid in their dens: Snakes, dormant but by no means dead, buried among windblown leaves and untouched by sun. These, unless aroused, would neither move nor eat again until spring.

Yet there was one copperhead in the Traps which was on the move. Shivering and hungry, it had crept from its lair before dawn; and the first rays of the sun found it at the north of the road and nearing the crags of Dickie Barre. It had legs, and it carried a rifle. When the morning smokes began to ascend from the houses, it was clambering stealthily up a slanting rift in the precipice. It sought to find, somewhere along the fissured brink, a cook-smoke which arose from no house; or, failing that, a habitation somewhere among the trees of the top.

Meanwhile, the very smoke for which this creature hunted was rising from the labyrinth on the eastern face of the butte. But it was invisible to any eyes at the southern end, for between those two points intervened a couple of miles of hummocks and timber. For that matter, that smoke-haze was so thin that it would have eluded the vision of any one much nearer to it. Where it had once taken the woods-wise Steve Oaks three days to locate Hard's cook-fire—and then only by scenting, not by seeing it—Copperhead's chance of repeating the feat was even thinner than the smoke itself.

The cave-man had slept through the night so soundly that he had not heard the rain. But the first peep of day aroused him, and he spent no time lingering in his blankets. Rolling out, he sniffed deep of the damp forest odor, glanced at the clean sky, stretched his powerful arms wide, and grinned like a giant refreshed. This smelled and looked and felt like his own old Traps, not like the bleak rock-hole of yesterday. As he squatted beside his fire and eyed the wet stones outside he smiled again. That downpour in the night, converting the crackling leaves into limp rags, would make for easy stalking today.

He ate rapidly; made a couple of bacon sandwiches with the remnant of a bread-loaf; stowed them in a pocket, armed himself, and left his stony home. Instead of following the same route as on the previous day, he turned cliffward, found the ascent which he had used before, and clambered—with considerable difficulty, for it now was slippery—to the top. Today he meant to detour by way of Peters Kill and comb the Minnewaska upland in the Cooper vicinity. Since yesterday's scouting at the clearing had yielded nothing, he was going a little farther afield.

At the top he paused to take in the vista. With the change in season, its masses of color now were far different from the swelling greenery which he had last seen from this spot. So clear was the air that rock and house and thin-leafed tree stood out with marvelous sharpness. For a few minutes he stood there, his gaze drifting north and south, and his thoughts reiterating:

"Gorry, if Jane could only git a look at this! The city can't give her nothin' half as pretty as these old hills where she was borned."

Then, in some unexplainable way, that gorgeous countryside seemed to grow blank, empty, a mere mass of colors without sense or feeling. He was lonely once more, lonely and cheerless. He turned his back on the scene.

The loneliness rode away on him, however, and would not be dispelled. His feet veered to the southwest, toward the Wilham home. He forced them to turn westward again, but soon they strayed southerly once more. This time he let them follow their own volition. He would not go to that home, for there lived the man who, at their last meeting, had called him a "dirty dog." But he could go to the southern cliffs facing the little yellow house, and, standing unseen on their brink, could look down at it. It lay less than half a mile from the precipice, and, with the air so crystal clear, he might see Uncle Eb smoking a pipe on the porch. Since he must journey southward anyway, he would lose no ground by yielding to the impulse.

AT THE same moment, on those southern crags, the human copperhead turned and began gliding slowly northward. He had been sneaking along them, peering down into every crevass on the mile-long southwestern front, until convinced that no man now was living there. The next section to spy on would be the long eastern flank, toward the Clove.

Hard Wood, having no reason to follow the raggedly tortuous verge of the butte, swung along inland among scattered trees and brush-patches, traversing the rolling, but smooth backbone of the crest and treading much bare rock. For nearly a mile he walked thus, advancing rapidly, jumping now and then across some deep but narrow rift whose bottom was buried in blackness. Then he came to a gully which, swinging away to the left, was virtually bare of undergrowth and afforded easy footing, while beyond it grew a dense mass of scrub. Following the line of least resistance, he journeyed along this depression until the scrub thinned out; then climbed a few feet and resumed his original course. He now was quite near both the eastern and the southern brink of the sheer wall terminating the mesa.

Through the woods he strode on, casting a perfunctory glance now and then to right or left. All at once he slowed. Over there at the left front, had something moved?

Something vague—something only half glimpsed—seemed to have passed across a semi-clear space framed between two trees something about as high as a man's head. Turning his gaze full on that spot, he saw mere empty brush, through which sprayed the slanting rays of the ascending sun. No man could be walking there, he decided, without being visible against that strong eastern light. The moving thing must have been a mere phantasm—unless, perhaps, it had stopped behind one of the trees. At this last thought he renewed his narrow scrutiny.

For several yards he advanced very slowly, making out nothing new. Then the phantom reappeared; vague as before, visible through the thin-leafed brush only because of the brilliant sun beyond it, yet unmistakably human. It seemed to be creeping along near the eastern edge of the drop, pausing at every few feet to look or listen. After a minute or so it faded behind another tree.

Hard's first impulse was to smile, his second to scowl; his first thought being that this was Steve, his second that it could not be. Steve knew the location of his cavern, so he would not be prowling at this point in search of it. The prowler was quite evidently hunting for something, and he was too near the edge to be seeking ordinary game. The cave-man's scowl bit deeper. He veered to the left again, directing his course to intercept that of the spy.

Detouring bush-clumps, he traveled noiselessly on bare rock for several rods. Then before him yawned a crevasse. He jumped it. His impetus carried him well beyond the farther lip and squarely upon a dead, bleached stick, so near the color of the rock that he had not observed it until too late. It broke with a crunching crack.

When he again searched the brush for the prowler, nothing resembling a human form was in sight. For unmeasured minutes he stood there, detecting neither sight nor sound of the phantom. Somewhere near at hand chirped a lonesome bird. Somewhere far away barked a dog. To the listener came no other indication of life.

With utmost stealth he began moving forward again. He did not know who that hidden man out yonder might be—whether he was Copperhead or some Trapsman attempting to smell out his cavern—but his intentions evidently were not friendly. One good glimpse of him would immediately decide the nature of Hard's subsequent procedure. Now he maneuvered to obtain that glimpse.

His uncertainty as to the character, if not the identity, of the other vanished before he saw him. As he descended a slanting slope of stone one smooth-worn heel came down on a wet leaf. The leaf skidded under him so suddenly that he lurched abruptly aside, then slid downward with startling speed. At almost the same instant, from the base of a tree some forty yards away, a flash stabbed toward him.

Bang! Pow-w-w-w!

The gunshot merged into the scream of a bullet glancing off the stone behind him.

Hard's rifle-butt snapped to his shoulder. Once, twice he fired at the spot whence that bullet had leaped.

A brush-patch just behind the tree shook violently. Hard rushed, shooting as he went. A fighting wrath had seized him. He went at this unknown gunman as he would have gone into a fist-fight—headlong, heedless, hitting hard.

No retaliating shot came from the region of the tree. With hammer back and the last cartridge of his string ready in the chamber, he reached the spot and found—nothing. The phantom had vanished again. But the watery marks of its feet were still there in the leaves. It had stood in a waist-deep depression, lying forward on a natural parapet and thus hugging the ground. Now it had retreated southward.

"Ye cussed coward, ye!" roared Hard, his weapon raised. "Stan' up an' fight!"

A shot banged in reply. Hard's coat,

hanging loose, flew back and yanked violently at his shoulders. The bullet had struck it waist-high at the left, missing his body by a couple of inches.

He snapped his remaining bullet at a half-seen head disappearing behind a tree trunk some rods to the southward. The smack of the lead against the tree came clearly to his ears, telling him he had missed his mark.

At once he dropped into the hole which had served his antagonist, and with fast-working fingers he reloaded. The instant his magazine was full he leaped up again, covering himself behind the tree whence the first shot had been fired. Hardly had he risen when splinters flew from the side of that trunk. The glancing bullet snarled viciously past him and plunked into a log beyond.

Hard dropped on one knee, leaned out, and glimpsed a rifle-barrel, a hand working on it, and part of a face topped by a shapeless felt hat. At once he shot for the face. It moved back just as he pulled trigger, however, and his ball merely barked the tree. But he had learned that the other gun was not a repeater—he had seen the reloading. Wherefore he delayed his next shot in order to draw his enemy's fire. In fact, he purposely exposed himself and pretended to be in difficulties with his own rifle, meanwhile watching the other tree. The ruse worked.

The other gun darted to an aim. Just as it flashed he threw himself back. The cold breath of the bullet found his face. Instantly he came forward again, leveled his piece—and involuntarily held his shot. For the first time, he saw all the other's face.

Perhaps Copperhead, a trifle slow of perception, had believed his foe's backward movement to be due to a hit. At any rate, his whole head now was in view, a malicious grin frozen on his lips as he found himself duped. For an instant the pair remained rigid. Then Hard dropped his head a trifle, caught the sights, and shot straight for the forehead.

But at that slight motion Copperhead dodged aside. The bullet missed his brow but tore off the upper half of an ear. The blow, the pain, the rush of blood wrung from him a howl. An answering yell, a fierce whoop of joy and hatred, burst from the tree where crouched his enemy. A crash of breaking brush instantly followed. Hard Wood was rushing again; rushing to the death grapple as ferociously as any of his Indian ancestors.

Had Copperhead stood his ground, he might have killed his foe then and there. His gun was unloaded, but he could have jammed in another cartridge before Hard could reach him. But the stuff in him was not stern enough to hold him there. As it had been on the day when he fought Hard and the "revenooers," so it was now, a wound struck him into panic, and he turned and fled.

HARD fired as he ran, but so eager was he to close with his enemy that he shot with bad aim. Brush was obstructing him, uneven ground destroyed his shooting balance, and, though he emptied his gun, his bullets did not bring Copperhead down. Yet, by the luck of battle, he hit his foe even while missing him. The last ball ricocheted off a rock and buried itself in Copperhead's right thigh.

He stumbled and fell. But his fear lifted him again and carried him on so quickly that he seemed only to have stubbed a toe. Madly he hurled himself toward the southern cliffs, hoping to find again the slanting rift up which he had come and precipitate himself down it to escape.

After him tore Hard, his speed almost redoubled now that he had ceased shooting. He made no attempt to reload; he was determined to run down the assassin and finish him with gun-butt or bare hands. Smashing through undergrowth, bounding high to clear rock or prone trunk or crevice, swerving around obstructing trees, he hurtled through the wilderness to the southern edge.

There, as he burst out into the open, a yell of savage exultation roared from his throat. Copperhead was cornered.

Out on the naked rock he was, unprotected by the slightest cover, trapped beyond hope of escape. Beyond him, the cliff dropped sheer for a hundred feet to jagged blocks. At the right yawned a crevasse too wide to be jumped. Behind him, his pursuer blocked him from regaining the tree-cover or from running to the left. And, even had the way been open, he could have run little farther. Every step he had taken with the right foot was marked on the bare stone by a red splotch.

Hopeless though his position was, he was stumping along the verge of the crevasse, frenziedly seeking some miraculous way of escaping across it. As the fierce shout of his Nemesis rang behind him, he jerked about and stood at bay.

So frightful was his appearance now that the vengeful taunts rising to Hard's tongue died unuttered. Blood from his torn ear, lacerated still further in his headlong flight through the brush, smeared one side of his face and dyed shoulder and chest. His mouth and nose, hurt by violent collision with a stone when the rebounding bullet felled him, drizzled more crimson fluid down over his chin. His clothes hung in shreds, and the right leg was saturated.

Yet these grisly externals were as nothing compared to the hideous visage revealing the soul beneath them. Under the unkempt coppery hair clinging greasily to his brow gleamed eyes inhuman as those of any reptile; behind his mashed lips snarled filthy teeth set in a grimace of murderous hate; at the corners of his down-turned mouth a pink froth churned as he panted for breath. Mingling with venomous rage and sickening fear was a haggard, drooling madness, born of haunting guilt and knowledge that at last he was run down.

Eying that demoniac countenance, Hard Wood changed from a man about to battle an enemy to one about to kill a snake. Tense, alert, his expression one of repulsion, his mouth clamped tight and his eyes cold and merciless, he advanced, gripping his rifle-barrel in both fists and swinging up the butt. Somehow the thought of shooting this creature did not now occur to him. It was a reptile, and he would crush it like a reptile—with a blow.

Step by step, yard by yard, steady and inexorable as the pulse of Doom itself, he approached. Eye held eye in a fixed stare. Five yards more, and that reversed rifle would crash down.

Then Copperhead shot.

Somewhere in his flight—perhaps after reaching the brink—he had reloaded. Now, with a gasping snarl horrible more than any words, he fired pointblank.

A terrific shock smote Hard in the chest. He halted short, staggered, nearly fell. All strength vanished. A wave of red and black assailed his brain, blotting out everything. Time, space, light, life, were nothing

Then he saw again—dimly, through a blur. He was strangling; he coughed up something thick and salty. His vision cleared. He was still on his feet. Beyond, grinning like a fiend, Copperhead was thumbing another cartridge into the barrel.

A flash of power returned. With all his strength he hurled his rifle. Copperhead, looking down as he snapped his loading-gate shut, dodged too late. Butt-first, the Winchester thudded into his face.

A gasp, a metallic *thwack* as his gun dropped, a futile struggle to recover balance—he was gone. From the crevasse sounded a hoarse croak, a slithering noise—then a crash among dead leaves far below.

So the rifle of dead Roberts, "loaned" by Parker to bring down the sole male Cooper remaining at large, had done its work at last.

Hard pitched forward, coughed, and lay still. On the brown rock before him formed a scarlet stain.

Then from the depths of the crevasse rose a scream. A scream of utter despair, of ghastly fear, of intolerable agony. It stabbed the fading senses of the prone man above like a spur. Reaching before him, he dragged himself forward to the edge. There he looked down.

"God!" he breathed.

Copperhead was still alive, but, broken by his fall and unable to rise, was meeting a death worse than that of blow or bullet. He had struck among leaves which, for numberless years, had drifted down from above to form a thick, slowly decaying bed. That bed had not been overlooked. Now, from under a jutting shelf of rock beside him, had erupted a dozen furious, hideous creatures which struck and coiled and struck again.

Screeching, writhing, thrashing about, Copperhead was dying in a den of copperheads.

With a sick shudder, the man above pushed himself weakly back from the brink. He coughed once more. Then his head dropped hard. All went black.

CHAPTER XXV

A HATCHET IS BURIED

SNOW, floating straight down in myriad fat flakes, blotted out the distances and blurred even the gnarled apple-trees a few rods outside the little window. Within the quiet bedroom prevailed a soft twilight which made vague all things except those nearest at hand.

To the wan-faced youth whose hollow eyes dwelt on the feathery deluge beyond the panes, the dimness seemed in accord with recent events. The things which of late had taken place were as misty in his mind as the more distant trees in the storm; many were as formless as the almost invisible forest on the limited horizon; a few stood out as unmistakably as the nearest branches of the orchard—strongly marked, yet not altogether clear-cut, against the moving curtain of Time. As for time itself, he could no more judge how many hours of it had elapsed than he could determine how many flakes were scooting downward at that moment.

Amid the memory-blur certain faces and voices and words were clear. First, those of Steve and Parker and a third man, a lantern-jawed, bleak-eyed stranger. He was lying on his back on hard rock, with a taste of mingled blood and whisky in his mouth. Parker, kneeling beside him, was working deftly with white cloth at a burning hole in his breast. Steve, his face drawn with anxiety, was stooping over him with a bottle. The stranger, leaning on a gun, was doing nothing but chew tobacco.

"Pretty work, boy, pretty work!" Parker was saying to him. "Got him after all, didn't yuh? It took yuh quite a while, but yuh sure finished him when yuh got to him. Now take it easy. Yuh got bumped a little yourself, yuh know. Don't try to talk. We know all about it. Stood right down yonder in the road and saw yuh. Now we'll ease yuh down to the house and— Hey, Oaks, give him another! He's goin' under again——"

A blank space. Then a sensation of being slowly carried over rough ground, and Steve's voice panting:

"I don't hardly see how he's a-goin' to live—hole clear through him like that—must of tore the lung outen him."

"He's tough," broke in Parker's crisp tones. "Built like a moose. And he looks like he'd always lived clean. That makes a lot of difference. The minute we git him to bed you tear out and git the fastest horse around here, and git for a doctor —— for leather. I think I can keep him alive till the doc can git here."

More blankness. Pain. The face and torso of the High Falls doctor, his coat and collar off, a red-stained cloth in his hands. Calm, cool professional tones:

"Steady, Wood, steady! What are you fightin' me for? Just lay quiet, my lad. You'll kill yourself with that wrastlin' around and talkin'. Stop it! Oh, well. Here, drink this. You're thirsty. Drink it. That's right. Now you're goin' to sleep. You're going to sleep. You're goin'——"

More pain. Fever. Headaches. Dreams. Sometimes the face of Uncle Eb; of Steve; of the doctor. Sometimes daylight, sometimes lamplight. At length—a silent room, a snowstorm outside.

He felt incredibly weak, but painless. His brain was clear. His body was deliciously lazy, resting in utter content. He essayed a long breath—then winced. A pain had stabbed his left lung near the heart. another breath, however, a shorter one, did not hurt. He must be a little careful about breathing. Then he would be very comfortable.

A slight sound at the door drew his gaze away from the window. His eyes met those of Steve.

"'Lo, Hard," came the familiar drawl. "Feelin' better, I see. If ye'll keep yer mouth shut I'll come in an' talk to ye a minute. But if ye start tryin' to talk yerself, I'll leave ye 'lone. Doctor says ye've got to keep quiet awhile yit."

The invalid made no answer. Steve lounged in, drew up a chair, studied him. Then his sober face lightened in one of his rare smiles.

"Good 'nough! Ye're gittin' 'long fine, spite o' yer foolishness. Ye ain't much good of a sick man, Hard—ye won't lay still. Doctor had to keep ye sleepin' most o' the time. But if ye'll show some sense now we'll have ye up out o' there, 'fore very long.

"Ye've had a narrer squeak, Hard. I swan, I thought ye was a goner, an' ye ain't rightly got no business to be a-livin' now. I dunno what that bullet done inside o' ye, but 'twas plenty. But doctor says ye're out o' danger now, pervidin' ye're mighty careful. So ye be careful! We don't want ye to up an' make a die onto us now—the ground's froze, an' 'twould be hard diggin'."

HE GRINNED again, and a faint smile was reflected on the thin lips of the wounded man.

"Now there's some things ye'll want to know," he went on, "an' I'll tell ye all that's needful for now. Ye know ye're into Uncle Eb's house, o' course. We brung ye right down here after the fight—me an' that revenooer Parker an' a feller, name o' Brown, from down Rutsonville way. They was up here to git Copperhead, an' we was jest a-goin' down to start huntin' for him when all this shootin' begun up onto Dickabar; so we stopped right into the road an' waited to see if anything come our way, an' somethin' did. We see the two o' ye come out onto the edge an' finish it. An' then we clumb up an' got ye. Copperhead—we left him right where he was. He might's well lay there as anywheres.

"This feller Brown, he's constable down to Rutsonville. Seems Copperhead went down there an' give some other name an' got him a job workin' onto a farm awhile. 'Tain't much of a place, ye know, an' it lays 'way off from any main road, an' nobody knowed him. Wal, bimeby he—uh—wal, he done somethin'—the less said the better. 'Twas a gal, an' I dunno whether she's still a-livin' or not. An' then he stole a rifle an' got outen there.

"Wal, the word flew all 'round, o' course, an' a description an' everything, an' this feller Parker, he got a holt of it; he was over to Gardiner 'bout somethin', I dunno what, when the word come. So he went to Rutsonville an' found out all he could, an' then him an' Brown come up into here. They come to me an' told me 'bout it, an' it madded me, an' the next mornin' we started out a-gunnin'. But I've told ye 'bout what happened after that.

"Wal, that's 'bout all, as fur's Copperhead's concerned. But I—uh—I want to tell ye—I'm awful sorry, Hard, that I turned ag'in ye. I mean 'bout Jane Cooper. I'd ought to of knowed ye better. But things looked awful bad, Hard, an' the hull thing kind o' made me lose my sense, I guess. One thing that always mads me is seein' somethin' helpless git treated mean. I don't care if it's a blind gal or jest a sick cat, if folks pick onto it I begin to taste blood. But I'd ought to of talked decent to ye when I found ye, an' give ye a chance, 'stid o' callin' ye names an' gittin' yer mad up.

"I know now where she is—I read them letters an' things into yer pocket. Ye told the Rhodes boys ye had proofs 'bout her, ye 'member, an' it didn't look like ye'd live, so I went through them things. It's wonderful, Hard, jest wonderful that ye could git her eyesight for her like that. I can't hardly b'lieve into it, even now, an' I ain't told folks 'bout it—they wouldn't b'lieve into it at all. I've jest told 'em I've seen the proofs ye carried, an' them proofs show ye told the truth, an' she's safe an' well an' happy; an' they've had to be satisfied with that.

"An' most of 'em is more'n willin' to be satisfied with that. Seems like they're kind o' shamed o' thinkin' so bad about ye; an' when ye git up ye'll find a hull lot o' folks wantin' to be friends with ye. One thing that makes 'em feel that way, mebbe, is 'cause ye give Copperhead his needin's. The hull Traps knows what he done down there to Rutsonville, an' it madded 'em, an' they're tickled to death over the way ye got him; an' then findin' out that they'd misjedged ye——

"Wal, folks is funny. Ther' ain't a day goes by that somebody don't stop in to see how ye're a-gittin' along; an' when ye git ready to go to work ag'in ye'll find lots o' chances—if ye want 'em. An' if I was you, Hard, I'd kind o' meet folks half-way when they're tryin' to be friends with ye. Ye never know when ye might need 'em."

There was a silence. The black eyes dwelt thoughtfully on the farther wall. To the helpless young giant, now shorn for the first time in his life of his all-conquering strength, the value of friendship was pointedly plain. But for friends, where would he now be?

After a time his lips opened. But Steve cut him off.

"No talkin', I tell ye! 'Bout yer things over into the rocks, now, they're all safe. I went an' got 'em. I've felt kind o' responsible for 'em ever since I drove ye outen there that night; that's why I fixed up everything there so's the animils wouldn't ruin 'em. Yas, 'twas me that done that—after I got over my mad. I kind o' took care o' things down to yer ol' place, too. I knowed ye'd come back sometime. Us hill folks always comes back. An' ther' warn't no sense into lettin' things go to rack an' ruin while ye was gone, even if us two should have a fight when ye did come back.

"An' I never told nobody where yer hide-hole was—didn't even tell 'em I'd ever found ye. So nobody but me an' you knows when the pair o' ye got outen the Traps, or 'bout yer livin' together three days over yender, or nothin'. What folks don't know don't hurt nobody, the way I look at it."

ACROSS the drawn face on the pillow swept pleased surprize. Then, feebly, a wasted right hand came creeping over the coverlet. Steve's darted to meet it. The silent clasp and pressure of those two gun-hands spoke volumes. In Steve's blood, as in Hard's, ran an Indian strain; and now, in silence, a hatchet was forever buried.

The older man relaxed his grip and arose, smiling once more.

"Come to think of it," he jested, "hard wood an' oaks come pretty nigh bein' the same kind o' timber. Wal, now take 'nother nap. See ye later."

Then Hard disobeyed orders and spoke.

"Ye ain't—wrote to Jane?" he whispered.

"Will ye shut up?" demanded Steve, frowning fiercely. "Doctor says— But there, mebbe ye'll rest easier if I tell ye all of it. I—uh—wal, mebbe ye'll say I hadn't no business to, but I did let Jane know. I didn't write to her myself, but I put Uncle Eb up to it. She's got a right to know what 'come o' Jerry, anyway, seein' he was her brother. An' so after awhile I got Uncle Eb to write to her—jest a few lines. But he didn't do it till jest lately, after doc said he was a-pickin' up; so we didn't tell her how bad hurt ye was—jest said ye'd got laid up awhile, but 'twarn't nothin' to worry 'bout.

"Wal, we got an answer back, an' ye can read it yerself bimeby. She didn't say nothin' at all 'bout Jerry, so she ain't feelin' bad about him. Ain't no reason why she should, neither. Le's see—oh, yas, she said she'd wrote to ye a couple o' times quite a spell ago, an' she'd jest found out lately the letters didn't never git mailed; she give 'em to somebody else to mail, an' they didn't do it. An' she was sorry ye'd got hurt, an' if 'twas real bad we'd got to let her know. An' she said she was a-goin' to come up here in the spring, anyway, an' mebbe stay here. Said she'd got tired o' the city; folks was too cooped up there, an' she couldn't git 'nough air, an' so on. 'Twas quite a long letter.

"Uncle Eb, he wrote right back to come an' live 'long of us, like she was s'posed to do when Joe give her into our charge. So, come spring, she'll prob'ly be here to stay quite awhile. I ain't a mite s'prized that she's got sick o' city things. She's a hill gal, an' it's like I said: Us hill folks always comes back. An' mebbe——"

He paused, eying the convalescent quizzically. Hard, his gaze riveted to the brown eyes, said not a word.

"Wal, mebbe ye'll want to be buildin' ye a new house 'fore another winter," Steve slyly concluded. "An' now I ain't a-goin' to say no more to ye. G'by."

Rapidly he stalked out. The door shut firmly behind him, and Hard was once more alone. So abrupt was the visitor's departure that the invalid scowled. There were things he wished to say, doctor or no doctor; and, for the moment, he was angered by the thwarting of his desire. But presently his eyes wandered again to the window and the falling snow, and a wan smile lightened his sulky expression.

Good old Steve! Fierce and rough and deadly dangerous at times, yet paradoxically loyal to a friend even while hostile to him, shielding him from others even while hunting him; taking care of his abandoned possessions in the face of every evidence of guilt and a taunting farewell; and, best of all protecting the reputation of a girl who had recklessly flung it away in an attempt to save her own abductor. A queer, inconsistent creature whose motives and acts would be inexplicable to most folks, yet were perfectly plain to Hard Wood; just as some of Hard's own deeds would be incomprehensible to the average Trapsman but entirely understandable to Steve. As Steve had said, these two were of the same kind of timber.

And Jane was coming back in the spring—to stay! Glory! The slick city fellers hadn't gotten her after all. She didn't like the city. She was a hill girl. She was coming back to see her native land and its people; to walk with confident step and clear vision, joyously viewing everything with the sight given her by one Hard Wood.

Yet, after all, had that black curse been lifted from her by Hard Wood? Or had he merely carried out the unspoken, uncomprehended bidding of some mysterious power greater than himself? Was he, who, in his harsh pride, had set himself up as Judgment and Fate, as omniscient and omnipotent as he had seemed to himself? In his present helplessness and solitude he felt far otherwise. And now his thoughts went back to the day when he had wrathfully arraigned his God, and to the days that had followed; and in retrospect began to form a strange sequence of events.

Roving aimlessly and bitterly, he had

strayed to Kyserike and the canal; and, returning, brought with him a discarded newspaper telling of the marvelous operation on James B. Thornton. The destruction of his house had led him to the Cooper clearing, and so to Jane. The theft of his mother's dress had brought Jane into his clutch, and so to that stark cavern. And there among the rocks she had fallen and regained her sight for an instant; and that chance-received, chance-read newspaper—gone but not forgotten—had become a miraculous key opening the black doors which had confined her.

Even the wrath of Steve had fitted into the queer plan of things—forcing them to go at once, at a time which proved opportune both for unhindered escape and for finding the wandering Thorntons at home. Then he had voyaged up and down the canal, learning more about life, absorbing the wisdom of Cap'n Davis, broadening his narrow mental horizon. And at last he had come back—to find his errant feet turned toward Copperhead on Dickie Barre, to destroy him, to be himself laid low, and thereby to be made to realize the love of man for man; more, to glimpse dimly the majesty of a supreme power which, at its own time, shaped human lives aright.

Had a single link of that odd chain been missing, everything might be far different now. Jane might still be blind, and wretchedly unhappy; Copperhead still alive and working evil; Hard himself dead. What mind had directed all these apparently disjointed happenings to the present end? And why?

For a long time the convalescent lay there, his gaze dwelling on the moving curtain of whiteness beyond the panes. At length, though his lips did not move, his mind spoke to the invisible ruler of the universe.

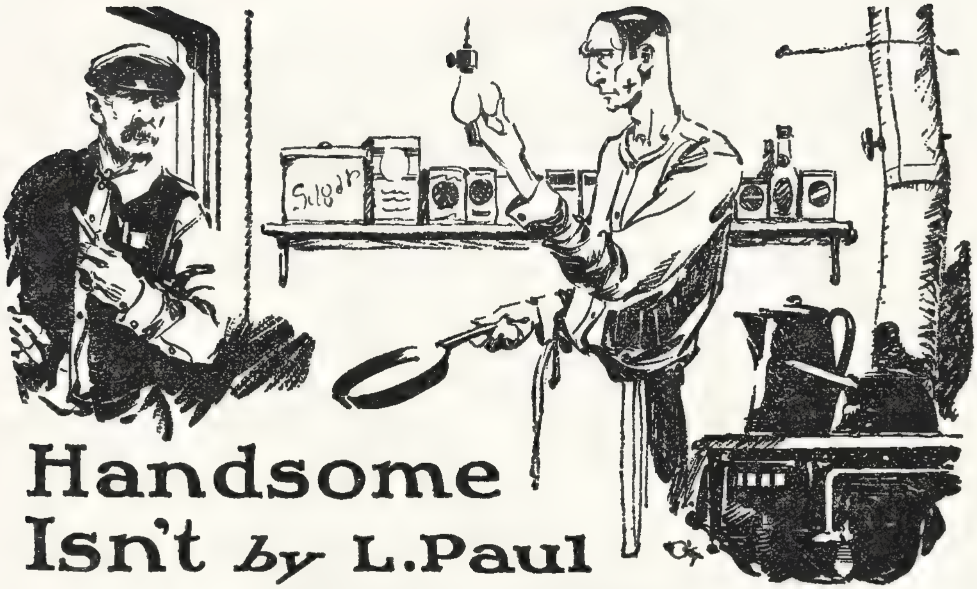
"God," it said simply, "mom used to say, 'Ye move in a mysterious way, Yer wonders to perform.' An' she said ye was a God o' love, long-sufferin' an' patient an' kind. I ain't b'lieved into that lately. But I guess she was right. She 'most always was. An' I guess mebbe Ye know what Ye're a-doin', an' 'tain't for us critters to try an' tell Ye what Ye'd ought to do. An' so I take back all I said to Ye awhile ago, an' ask Yer pardon for sayin' it. I guess I was wrong."

Then he smiled, and the eyes watching the snowfall began to close. Presently the lids lay quiescent, and, except for short, regular breathing, there was no sound or motion in the storm-shadowed room.

On the peaceful face of the youth who rested there still remained the little smile. He was wandering in a land where cold and winter were not. And he was not alone. Beside him walked one whose eyes had been opened to the beauty of the hills in the summertime, and who now beheld the gray and the green and the blue of stone and forest and sky, the countless hues of flower and bird and butterfly. And, as they drifted onward, somewhere far off echoed words which, spoken by a saturnine wolf-man and killer, yet were magic that had caused the portals of dreamland to open:

"*Us hill folks always comes back.*"

THE END



Handsome Isn't

by L. Paul

Author of "Stummicks," "Rabbit Foot," etc.

CAPTAIN SALEM walked uncertainly into the Excelsior Towing Company's offices. Here he was, only a month in command of one of their tugs, and coming to register a kick already. And behind that month of command lay years of work, when, as spare captain, he had waited for the chance of promotion.

Captain Salem was getting on in years, and he didn't like the idea of looking for a new billet. But things had got so that something had to be done about them.

"It's that there he-cook, Lemuel," he told the manager. " 'Course I ain't the kind to kick over trifles like a soggy pie or a bit o' burnt beef, so long as a man can fill up otherwise. But this here Lemuel that you have wished on to the *Viking*, mister, is too danged consistent. Any time he don't cook a thing bad he cooks it worse."

The manager, a thin energetic man and a shark for efficiency, smiled coldly.

"Let me see. Captain, you have had command of your tug, the *Viking*, for a month. No longer. Now you come in here and raise a howl about the grub, and all the time, if you only knew it, that cook, Lemuel, whom you slander, is helping your reputation with the company."

"He may be helping my rep. with you folks, but he ain't addin' to his own 'board ship. And if we've run the old *Viking* proper, well, 'tis but the shadders of our old selfs is doing it."

Salem tried to state his case calmly but the manager's manner was getting under his skin.

"You can't run no craft with living skeletons, mister, and that's a fact. But that's what we'll come to aboard the *Viking* if this here Lemuel keeps on workin' his will on us."

The manager reached for a sheet of paper on his desk.

"Here's what I mean," he explained. "That cook, Lemuel, costs us less per man per month than any other in the fleet. And when a boat is run cheaply the captain shares in the credit. Lemuel puts grub on the table for twenty-six cents per man per day. The next best is thirty-seven, and, of course, your record is helped by that as well as his."

"And fine it will look on my tombstone, 'He saved the comp'ny money,' " old Cap'n Salem complained. "Oh, 'tis not a groucher I am, mister, but if ye sot in just once to what Lemuel calls dinner——"

"If you can't see which side your bread is buttered on—" the manager picked up another sheet of paper— "here are the applications we received this month for jobs. Know any of them? Skilled captains, every one. Now let me hear no more grumbling. Sailors have to grouch once in so often and

I won't hold it against you this time that you are no exception. But mark my words, as long as that Lemuel wants his job he holds it."

Which ended the argument. Which explains why Captain Salem, dragging his feet, returned wearily to find a hopeful crew whom he must now cast down into the depths of despair.

"He ain't only a food butcher, he's economic, the danged snide Lemuel is," Captain Salem reported to the group on the Helmshaven pier head as he came alongside the *Viking*.

"In which case 'tis a life sentence we have," "Gloomy" Riggs, the engineer, moaned.

"Yeah! Mebbe. But let's hope it's Lemuel's life," Bill Bowers, an optimistic fireman, put in.

Captain Salem brightened at his words.

"You don't find much sense in the black gang as a rule," he said, "But you have given me a bit of an idee. 'Course I ain't one to recommend murder, but if we can make things hot enough for the scout Lemuel, he'll maybe get out."

"Not him, he's stubborn," Gloomy assured them. "I went to school with him. Four years it took him to learn his A.B.C.'s and often I mind the teacher stood over him lookin' sort of hopeless at Lemuel and' sayin', 'I've tried shamin' you, Lem. I've tried coaxin' you. I've tried beatin' you. But you don't profit by none of them methods.' "

"Reckon that there school teacher didn't know his business," Captain Salem remarked. "He didn't try poison. But the chore boy's ringin' the bell for supper. S'pose we got to go suffer as usual. Afterwards, Gloomy, you and this here intelligent fireman come have a bit of a talk with me."

AND so, after Lemuel had disappointed the more optimistic, as usual, in the matter of supper, the three gathered in Captain Salem's cabin.

"Now Bill," the captain eyed the fireman sternly, "by rights you shouldn't be settin' there smokin' my seegars and talkin' informal with your skipper and engineer. But there's a reason. I been thinkin' over what Gloomy remembered about Lemuel's schoolin'. And since the idee is to shift him, I kind of think we'd best go back over the course that there teacher set, the bearings being: Coax him; shame him; beat him, but we'll navigate more thorough. We've tried coaxin' him and can leave that out."

"He can't be shamed," Gloomy put in hopelessly.

" 'Twould be hard," Salem agreed, "so we'll leave it to the last. Which means——"

"Beating him," Gloomy scowled. "And while it'd be a pleasure to do so personal and proper, I like my job and need my pay and if he's a favorite with the manager, me, I don't try beating him."

"Which same applies to me." Captain Salem winked at Bill Bowers, the fireman. "It ain't work for a skipper, beatin' up his crew. But there's no tellin' what might happen to Lemuel the cook. The men is getting desperate. I seen him strolling round town, nights, sneerin' at them chink restaurants, or peepin' at the pots and pans in the hardware store windows, for it must be admitted he takes his profesh serious. But it's dark on the wharf late at night when he comes back and it's a wonder some brave lad hasn't took a crack at him before this."

Bill Bowers, the fireman, grinned and rose.

"I just remembered," he said, edging towards the door.

"Remembered what?" asked Gloomy Riggs. "When firemen starts rememberin' the world's end is nigh."

"I remembered a date I had." Bill stepped out. "A date to go take a slant at them chink cafés, likewise to throw an eye over some o' the hardware store windies. It'll be dark on the wharf when I come back, and accidents happens at times."

"You keep on bein' bright and we'll make an engineer of you yet," Gloomy promised as the door closed, "providin' you don't croak first with a stomach full of Lemuel's vittles."

II

"NOW there's them would call that a face, and there's others would say it was raw beef," Captain Salem told his cook the next morning. "You ain't been brawling round last night, Lemuel, have you?"

"I knows what I knows," growled Lemuel the he-cook, who was holding eggs up to the light and examining them conscientiously. "I ain't sayin' nothing, but I'm right curious to cast my eye suspicious over some of this ship's company."

"And why so?" asked Captain Salem innocently.

"Because I got bit as well as hit."

Lemuel stretched out his right hand, back up.

"Bit on the knuckles," he added.

Captain Salem took another look at his ruined countenance.

"You'd best take a spell ashore, Lemuel. Them there bruises look mighty bad. I heard of a fellow got gangrene from a bruise. Better keep nigh the doctor till they're healed up proper."

"Thank you kindly—" Lemuel set an egg down and reached for a small fry-pan—"your kind heart does you credit, Cap, and after all's said and done I deserve kindness from you, me bein' such a faithful sort o' cook, not to say talented. But I ain't the sort to shirk. Long as I can do my chores satisfactory, like I been doin' them right along, I don't figger on taking no shore leave. When a man puts his heart into his work like I do he's best off when busy."

"Suit yourself, Lem."

Captain Salem rose. Through the window of the galley which also served as a messroom, he had seen a coal-blackened face that was a bit the worse for wear.

"But don't you go considerin' us, Lemuel. If that there map of yourn hurts you, go ashore and rest. Bless you, we'd hate to lose you, and all that, but we're human, and kindhearted, we are."

"Not the one that bit me," Lemuel retorted.

The captain stepped out one door as the two firemen off watch came in the other. He paused outside for a bit. Something told him that Lemuel was craving action of some sort. A moment, then—

"Somethin' smells bad round here. Is it that face?" asked Bill Bowers.

"Thasso?" Lemuel fixed a hostile eye on him. "Hurt yer lip, hey? Run into somethin' with it? Got a loose tooth, too?"

"None o' yer business."

Bill Bowers the fireman, as he looked Lemuel over, felt he had done a good job; wished, with the pride of a conscientious artist that he could, so to speak, sign his masterpiece, acknowledging that face as his handiwork.

Lemuel slid a couple of fried eggs out of the small pan on to a plate and placed them on the table.

"Eat hearty," he said.

"Them words don't mean nothin' when you do the cooking." Bill retorted. "What's wrong with you this morning? Been in a fight?"

"There's them that can fight with fists," Lemuel explained, "and there's them that fights with other weepuns. What's wrong now?"

Bill Bowers had merely wolfed his first fried egg. Now he rushed for the rail, gagging and choking.

"I picked that there egg personal for a treat," Lemuel grinned as he went on. "Since you said it last night with fists, I sort o' answered you with eggs—rotten eggs. Each to his own weepuns, Bill Bowers."

"And that don't work, beatin' him up," decided Captain Salem. "I'm mighty glad Bill Bowers it was took that particular job."

"You don't look cheerful," Gloomy Riggs hailed him from the engine-room as he started forward.

"But I figger I look lucky," Captain Salem corrected him. "S'pose I had beat up Lemuel 'stead o' poor Bill."

He explained what had happened.

"However, I ain't give up. You'll mind how Lemuel don't like rough weather. An' his luck's held for quite a spell, with us on harbor-towing exclusive. But I got word this mornin' we're to run up to Fairport, and mebbe—well, ye'd best make everything fast below."

"You'll not succeed," Gloomy assured him. "I know what you plan to do, but that there Lemuel is permanent here. Bill, poor reckless lad, beat him up cruel and yet here this Lemuel stays spoilin' grub same as before."

"I'm going to try." Captain Salem went forward. "There ain't no wind or sea, but mebbe I can manage."

THEY cast off from Helmshaven pier and headed out to sea, then swung up the coast. A beautiful day it was, calm, with scarcely the suspicion of a swell. But Captain Salem knew a trick or two. He began to roll his helm, putting it from port to starboard, from starboard to port; the *Viking*, cutting along at twelve knots began to wallow like a pig, as a tug will when so mishandled.

Captain Salem peeped out of the wheelhouse. Bill Bowers, the fireman, was standing aft, eyeing the galley door with an expectant smile on his face. From the engine-room half-door protruded the head of Gloomy Riggs, the engineer, and he too looked like a man expecting good news.

Captain Salem dodged back and swung the helm over again a bit quicker; kept at it till the *Viking* began to roll her guard under.

A door popped open, the galley door, and Lemuel the he-cook came out on the run, his complexion a yellow-green. He dived for the rail, leaned over, became very busy.

Satisfied, Cap'n Salem straightened away on his course.

"That's riding him, sailor," he thought. "Reckon he won't feel too good, and havin' to live intimate with food won't help him none."

His smile lasted till supper time. Then Gloomy Riggs came forward to do what he could to erase it.

"Got somethin' to show you," he remarked sadly. "If so be you was figgerin' on botherin' Lemuel, you've succeeded. Shame on you, Cap'n!"

"He *was* sick, wasn't he! Even an iron-gutted man wouldn't like bein' sick as him in the presence o' so much bum grub, let alone a delicate critter like Lemuel. He'll be leavin' us at Fairport, mark my words."

Captain Salem turned the wheel over to the mate and came aft.

The galley door was closed and locked. A little group of sailormen stood outside. They were reading a roughly penciled cardboard placard.

OWING TO THE SUDDENT SICKNESS OF THE CHEF THERE AINT GOIN' TO BE NO SUPPER.

"We're gettin' on fine," said Gloomy Riggs. "Me, I'm forehanded and lucky. Got a bag o' biscuits in my cabin. What's more there's no use lookin' at me like that, Cap'n. I'm greedy, I am."

III

"HE CAN'T be coaxed off this craft, that Lemuel. And he don't answer to abuse like a human being should."

Captain Salem caressed his stomach gingerly. There was a brooding pain there for, with the *Viking* tied up at Fairport wharf, Lemuel had recovered enough by breakfast time to stage his usual attack on all hands.

"I'm for poison," Gloomy Riggs decided.

"We'll try shame first." Captain Salem picked up a paper he had been reading. "Seems that one o' these here Bostock papers, the *Blade*, has got a flash o' sense. Figgers that folks is tired o' these here beauty contests with nothing but bathing girls year after year. And them newspaper lads has thought up another kind o' competition."

"What for, the worst cook on the coast?" Gloomy grabbed the paper.

"For the homeliest man in New England, and a prize for him when found of a thousand dollars." Captain Salem replied, and waited while his engineer read the item.

"I been hearing about this here yellow press all my life and now I guess I'm readin' it."

Gloomy spelled his way slowly through the announcement.

"'Tis as you say. 'Course a thousand is mighty hand to have," he remarked. "But there's no tellin'. I ain't *seen* no homelier man on the coast, but I been below mostly when we're travelin' and I might ha' missed one, or mebbe two. What'd you do with the thousand if so be——"

"Just what does that there question mean? Anything personal?" Captain Salem growled.

"Why, ain't you enterin' this contest?" Gloomy Riggs registered surprize.

"Don't get insultin'. Be practical. I ain't no bathing beauty, mebbe. Like wise I'm not a horned toad. Pleasant if plain, that's me. But—" Cap'n Salem dropped his voice—"you go aft to the galley an' tell that there Lemuel his grub is rotten and then take a look at his face. And if you see what I seen, time after time, well you'll come through with your dollar for half of it."

"Half o' what?" Gloomy asked suspiciously. "I ain't denyin' that Lemuel's most as homely as—well, as some others I've seen frequent, but I ain't giving him no dollar for that."

"Dollar apiece for the photygrafter. To take a shot at him," Cap'n Salem explained. "See? We send this here picter to the Bostock papers and if Lemuel wins, which is likely, you can figger it out. What them office sharks calls 'Judicious Publicity' 'll do the rest. Don't you see it, Gloomy? Every time he gets into port anywheres he'll hear of it, will Lemuel, the homeliest man in New England. If he wins that there prize, that is. And though his nerves is cold and his heart strong, the both of 'em will break with the shame of it. For a homely man's tetchy about his looks, as you may have noticed."

"That he is, and often I've said as much to myself." Gloomy agreed.

"And what'll happen? With a thousand bucks in his pocket and shame in his heart, Lemuel the he-cook, homeliest man in New England, 'll buy as many miles o' railroad fare as his roll will stand. And Lemuel a thousand dollars worth away— Well, you go back aft to the galley and sort of refresh your memory about his mush. And don't look at me like that. I'm no baby doll, but I don't hurt your eyes none, Gloomy Riggs, and don't you go pretendin' that I do! Take a slant at Lemuel our he-cook and then if you won't put up your dollar on this scheme, I'll put it up for you."

Five minutes later Gloomy came back.

"Well?" asked Captain Salem.

"Speakin' the strict truth, Lemuel's ain't the sort of face that grows on me, and thank —— it don't." Gloomy fished out a dollar. "Now, how do you figger on shootin' him while he's got the right expression on that map?"

"Leave that to me," Captain Salem grinned confidently. "I been thinkin' up a new way of insultin' the scut. I'll have the photygrafter down and I'll call Lemuel up on the pier after dinner. You keep the lads back, and when I give ye a sign have them laugh at my little joke."

"How'll they know it's a joke?" Gloomy objected. "Sometimes a man thinks he's right funny when he ain't."

"There's times—" Captain Salem reached for the ladder that led to the dock—"there's times when I think I'm mistook in my aims. Might pay better to get rid of my engineer than my cook."

But, full of his own plan, he soon forgot any little irritation he felt. He knew that all great thinkers have such sorrows to face. And the new scheme looked good.

HE stepped uptown and hired a photographer, explaining matters to him frankly. And because the photographer was newly married and suffering a bit along the same lines as Captain Salem, that is, in his stomach, he fell in with the plan right away.

"I'll come," said he, "and gladly, and you can keep the money."

"Then will you do me another favor. Which is show me the handiest city dump," Captain Salem replied.

When they finally got back to the *Viking* the photograph man had his hand camera and Captain Salem a sack. The photographer holed up in the wheelhouse while the lads were at dinner.

When the meal was over Captain Salem climbed up on the wharf and grabbed that sack, which bulged a bit. He cast an eye over the *Viking*. Gloomy Riggs had done his part. The crew, to a man, were lounging about, watching him. Like a cheer leader at a college football match Gloomy himself was standing alert on the rail, arms uplifted ready to give the signal.

The captain opened the sack and slid its contents out on the planking. Then he called Lemuel the cook.

Lemuel came reluctantly out of the galley and climbed up beside him.

"Can't ye leave me finish my work?" he grumbled. "If ye knowed how much brain work there is to cookin' ye'd not be callin' me like a bellhop every time ye have a bright thought."

Captain Salem pointed down at the planking.

"What do ye see?" he said sternly.

"I see dog and I smell dead dog," Lemuel told him.

"And don't death suggest nothing?" Salem went on, gripping him by the arm and swinging him round till he faced the wheelhouse. "Don't that there great brain you brag about tell you nothing when you see death? Or if not the brain, perhaps the conscience is whisperin'."

"I don't know what ye rave about so," Lemuel whined. "The dog's very dead. Even if I was one of them fussy French chefs I could do nothing with him."

"It's what's been done *to* him. You are a careless man, Lemuel, and well I know how it happened. A piece of that pie we had for dinner it was, and you left it lying round carelesslike. Which same this poor dog ate, an' now—look at him now."

And drawing out his red bandanna Captain Salem began to weep audibly, wiping his eyes frequently as he did so; then stepped aside quickly. For a second Lemuel stood there, his face a blank. Then slowly he got it. A flash of color swept into his sallow cheeks.

At that moment Captain Salem waved his arms.

"Let her go!" cried Gloomy Riggs on the rail.

The ship's company let her go. Sufferers all, they got their revenge. Their loud laughter drowned the click of the camera.

"It's my belief," said Lemuel, the he-cook, who, like all stubborn folks, thought slowly, "It's my belief, Captain, that you drug me up here to be insulted."

And he stood there for a moment looking down at that dead dog. Even his dearest friend would have admitted that Lemuel at the moment was no beauty.

"I'll lay two to one we got the winner o' that contest," cried Captain Salem.

"I wouldn't bet that there dawg ag'in' your dollars," Gloomy Riggs retorted, an optimist for the first time in his life.

IV

FOR a week the *Viking's* crew bore up under Lemuel's continued assaults on their digestion. The tugboat was for the time on a salvage job up the coast a bit which made matters worse, for hungry folk could not slip ashore to buy the odd square meal. However, buoyed up by a great hope, one and all suffered in silence.

"And I'm feared it ain't good for Lemuel," Gloomy Riggs told the captain. "If we don't growl and snap at him more he'll get the idee he's improvin', which he ain't. I can see he's gettin' conceited more'n ever he was."

"He's got his coming," Captain Salem grinned, "and soon, too, for that there paper we saw was the last call for homely men. The results will be out any time now. I reckon Lemuel'll find the glad news waitin' for him at Helmshaven Saturday night when we get in. And pass the word to let him go for the mail alone. 'Tain't delicate to peep and pry into a man's emotions."

"And this just Thursday." Gloomy tightened his belt. "I've stopped throwin' any shadder already. Hope I last till Saturday night."

"If you croak you'll be revenged," Captain Salem comforted him. "Think of Lemuel's feelings when he sees that there paper, always providin' he wins."

"Which is certain sure." Gloomy took heart. "Never did I see a homelier man than him standin' there lookin' at that dead dawg. But I warn ye, if this stunt don't work I'll try poison."

"You won't need to," Salem assured him.

But this was only Thursday.

Saturday came. The captain wasted no time. With darkness he rang for full speed ahead. The engineer opened her wide and the *Viking* foamed along toward the harbor.

Not a man went ashore when she tied up, save Lemuel. As for him he wandered up to the company office after mail, expecting to get a free cook-book he'd sent for and little thinking what was in store for him.

Scarce a word did the others say as they waited patiently for his return, that afflicted crew of the *Viking*.

He came at last, his tall gangling figure throwing a grotesque shadow as he passed the last street light.

"Mebbe he didn't win that there contest." Gloomy Riggs peered earnestly down the wharf. "He walks jaunty and proud, does Lemuel."

"P'raps they ain't finished judgin' them picters." Captain Salem took a more hopeful view. "Any news, Lem?" he called as the cook clambored aboard.

"Some might call it news. Some mightn't."

Lem stuck out his chest; he held a letter in his hand.

"We goin' to be here tomorrow?"

"Why do ye want to know?"

Every man aboard leaned forward as the captain asked his question. Eagerly they waited for the answer.

"Friend o' mine comin' down," Lemuel replied, his voice a trifle throaty. "Do ye think 'twill be a fine day, Cap?"

Then without waiting for an answer he made for the galley, slamming the door shut after him.

"He ain't won that prize," Gloomy complained, "or if he has, he's bearin' up handsome."

"He is that, bearing up proud." Captain Salem was still on the hopeful side of things. "He's hiding the ache in his bussom from us. Right now I'll bet he's weepin' in the galley. You wait till tomorrow. Know what I think? He's plannin' on beating it. This here friend that's comin' is some simple shoregoin' lad with a job to offer and Lem's scared he won't come if it's bad weather.

"Now listen close, the pile o' ye. I'm

tender-hearted, I am, and we played it low down and dirty on poor Lem, broadcastin' how homely he was all over New England, for that's what it amounts to if he's won that contest. So let's lay off him at breakfast, and if you can pass a compliment on the grub, do so. If ever I seen a brave man hidin' a broken heart 'tis the champion homely man o' these parts, who's just gone by, tuckin' away his busted heart behind a smile."

"How're you so danged certain sure he won that contest?" Gloomy asked.

"I seen the printin' on that letter—from the Bostock *Blade* it was, and registered at that," Captain Salem answered.

V

MORNING. Kind hearted sailormen, struggling with their breakfast, smiled upon Lemuel the he-cook. One hardy soul complimented him on his porridge, which was, as usual, burnt. Others saw good points in the scorched dry bacon where good points there were none. A generous lot are sailormen at times.

Morning, and Captain Salem stood on the wharf, eagerly watching for Lemuel's mysterious friend; and, the dishes washed, Lemuel the he-cook joined him in his vigil.

"I ain't proud. You'll admit I ain't proud?" Lemuel said.

"That I will," lied tender-hearted Salem. "That I will, Lem."

"But a man that's a head liner, a champeen, well, he's a champeen no matter what in. There ain't nobody ahead of him," Lemuel went on placidly.

"Mebbe you ha' the rights of it."

Salem looked blank. This did not sound like heartbreak.

" 'Course there's some tetchy folks might get sore, but me, I sort o' see things broadminded."

Lemuel kept his eyes on the shore end of the pier as he went on, "And if a man's famous, well, he's famous, that's all. Look at Kaiser Bill. Every one knows about him, and he's no plaster saint. But he's well known, what I mean. Yes, sir, it pays to advertise, no matter what pertickler gift ye have. Me, I get a thousand dollars besides, and not bein' vain—"

"Will you stop tellin' riddles?" Salem started.

Things were not working out according to plan.

"I'm the homeliest man in New England," Lemuel told him, simply, "but I ain't proud. I don't feel all puffed up and I'm not forgettin' my old friends just because I won out. Yes, sir, some one sent my photygraft to the Bostock *Blade's* Contest and I won her. What do ye think of that?"

"But homely—seems to me a man ought to be sort of ashamed o' bein' homely." Captain Salem clung desperately to what hope was left. "Won't every one be saying, 'There goes Lemuel, the homeliest man in New England. My, aint he plain?' "

"Ah, but ye forget. They'll say more," Lemuel smiled proudly. "They'll say that, right enough, but more too. 'There he goes, Lemuel, the homeliest man in New England, but the best cook in the world!' Ye see, the paper's sendin' a man down to take a proper picter of me, and to get the story o' my life, for the readers of the *Blade*.

"And when I tell him all the lads said so kind at breakfast he'll know what a slambang cook I am. Took a mort o' time to jar them praises loose, but I done it. Merit won out, Cap'n. It'll make me famous, it will. An' as for bein' plain, why 'tis just like them flivvers. Folks make so many funny cracks at 'em that every one knows about 'em, and buys 'em.

"Publicity, that's what. Handsome is as handsome does, Cap'n Salem. O' course I don't mind them thousand dollars neither. Fact is I'd like to know who sent in that there picter of me. I'd like to shake his hand, I would, and thank him."

"And what will you do with all that money?" asked Captain Salem in a hushed voice.

Here was the final hope. Surely with fame and a thousand dollars Lemuel would leave this job for fairer fields.

"What'll I do? It's done, or nigh done. I met up with the manager of our company last night at the office, and ye know how they're strong for us employees ownin' shares in the concern? Well, I told him I'd take the whole thousand in stock when I got the check cashed, and now I'm one o' your bosses, Cap'n Salem. Wouldn't be surprized if they made me a director when I get good and famous with all the publicity that's comin'."

"That'll be nice, Lem. You settin' pretty ashore in the office."

Captain Salem's optimistic soul could still discern one feeble ray of light in the general gloom.

"Yes, sir, settin' pretty ashore."

"Set nothin'." Lemuel started to climb up on the wharf as a man appeared at the shore end. "A cook I am and a cook I'll stay. I figger we're wastin' too much money on grub on these here tugboats. And I aim to stick right aboard and work things out economic. I been overfeedin' you folks with luxuries, I guess, and there's room for improvement."

He turned and faced the captain as he stepped over the stringer of the pier. "I ain't proud," he concluded. "Many a man would be. But me, I ain't got no artistic temperament like some famous men. And I ain't jealous. That there lad'll be taking my picter and many a man'd ask ye to step inside and hide while he done it."

"And why?" asked Captain Salem. "And why would many a man ask that?"

"So's we wouldn't get mixed. If you was in the picter," answered Lemuel, the homely neophyte of fame, "if you horned in to this here photygraft some o' my fool public might think you won the prize."

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

The Eternal Struggle

I

As LONG as we breathe there can be no peace.

Peace implies satisfaction, and a state of rest, I suppose.

The only spiritual peace is a state of war.

I have a dear friend who writes that I must find "the central peace."

I reply—

"Give me war—war to the end—I ask no peace.

Once a man is satisfied that he has found peace I think that he begins to lose out in the fight toward the Grail.

How shall a man find peace when the world is chock-a-block with suffering?

I'm a bum talker. But what I mean is, don't fuss about to find spiritual peace.

I rather think that there is a hand upon our shoulder whose owner knows what lies within our hearts.

The time of one's greatest peace is in the thick of the fight.

It's the only peace worth a man's consideration at all.

War as long as we are here—and what comes after is none of my business to fuss over.

For my part I wish to Heaven I could grow up and learn to be a real man.

God step along beside you, anyway.

II

I WAS raised up, my lad, where nothing could be done well enough.

There was never satisfaction in attainment—for the reason that there was always the need to go one better yet.

Life must be gone at bare-handed, without gloves for the helmsman's fingers or ointment for his sea-cracked palms. Life is a hard job.

Life is as a ship at sea.

No polish upon her brass-work is polish bright enough. It must be yet further embellished.

Satisfaction is a rotten egg—a maggot in moldy hardtack.

Well, it gives me great delight if I can give anybody pleasure, but I can not give them pleasure enough.

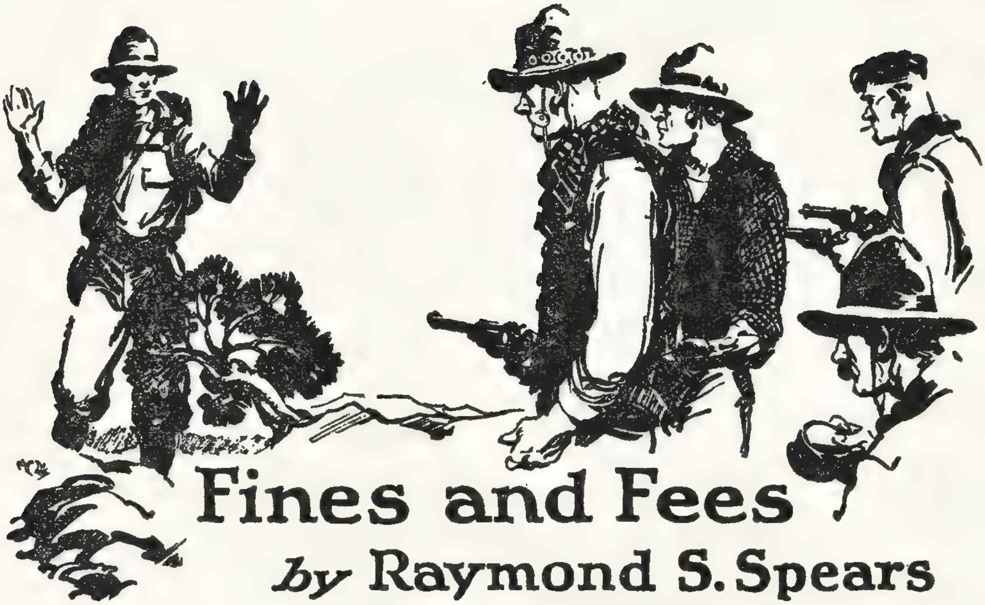
Most of all I like to give a boy pleasure, I think, remembering what a tale of adventure used to mean to me twenty-five years ago. I'd like to send a thousand boys a week away from their homes to go look for a ship.

I had a letter from a man yesterday saying—

"Durn you—my boy wants to go to sea."

I wrote back and said—

"Let him go."



Fines and Fees

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Willie alias Bill," "Sheriff Durand Deputes," etc.

REDBONE'S new City Hall was built of imported lumber, covered with paint on the outside and thick varnish within. The lumberman would recognize the coarse grain of Georgia pine in the heavy streaks up the walls and across the City Court ceiling. Many unpainted hard-bottom chairs were on one side of a heavy fence that looked cheap despite its size, serving as a railing to keep spectators separated from the chosen. The judge, Pete Cantone, leaned his elbows on a varnished kitchen table, The Statutes between them. He always looked over the right end of the table, forgetting the brass cuspidor was always on his left.

City Marshal Dobane was a lank, long, thin-nosed, purple-eyed killer, who always sought the jobs where he could have action, and where too close inquiry would not be made into his activities when a coroner sat on the unlamented victims of fast draw and prompt trigger work.

Jim Farest would never forget the Redbone City Court. He had not known that this was his destination, yet for some three thousand miles he had been heading toward it with the finality of a decree of Fate. He had come leisurely. He walked a good deal of the distance. Friendly automobile drivers had given him lifts at the rate of a day's walk an hour. He had worked for farmers, a blacksmith, a widow who owned a restaurant, a portable sawmill owner, a wheat grower, a butcher driving seven head of cattle, and a number of other people having odd-jobs at which to employ him.

Most of his meals were paid for by labor. He sawed wood, mowed lawns, milked cows, and even turned the wringer for a tired woman who was doing a heavy washing one Monday morning. He had slept in beds only five or six times in his long-drawn stroll. He carried on his back a shoulder-strap contraption that held a fine woolen blanket, a waterproof tarpaulin, and some odds and ends of camp equipment and extras. By these he was distinguished from the shiftless and unforeseeing hobo, the mere vagabond.

Jim's ideas of the United States were pretty well limited to a geography lesson he had stayed after school to learn, when he was twelve years of age. That lesson related to the Desert of Sahara, and its drifting sands. He remembered the lesson, but not much else. Two terms of school at geography had made that subject an evil memory in his mind, with only occasional names and facts like Himalaya, China, Indian Ocean, Ceylon, Argentine, mineral products, Salt Lake City, Alaska; and to this array he had subsequently added from the newspapers, Reno, Georgia, Michigan City, Quebec, Bangor, Me., and Tia Juana. Some names he couldn't remember lurked in his mind, but he couldn't say them. Something interesting, like prize fights, murders, and lots of easy money had happened at these dim localities, Goldmeadow, for example—something like that,

One day he "took a notion" and started on a walk. He sauntered along. He wasn't going anywhere in particular, but he was on the way. ·His job in the Chiper Mills had faded out in a shut-down. Accordingly, he went looking for work. He found meal-ticket jobs, and two-bit pickups. Always, he had money with him. He paid his way, working, or with cash. He suddenly discovered that he was "seeing the country." Beneath his feet had passed highways and byways.

He had been down to Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania, then over in West Virginia, and up across the Ohio to Lake Erie. He was surprized to learn, one day that this was Indiana! Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas followed. He struck Oklahoma, with a lot of Indians mighty well dressed up, for the most part. Oil rig work gave him a smattering of the labor. The well digging ended in a dry hole, or perhaps grateful and jubilant owners would have given him a real stake. He crossed Red River on a bridge. Its color told him its name, and he wished he had known why it was Red, back in school.

"Jee!" he thought, "geography's interesting, when you see it!"

He wished it had been interesting in school. He'd known lots more if it had. He had verified nothing that he had learned, except Oklahoma. The old Indian Territory was wonderful. And presently he came to Texas. He paid his fare across the ferry by picking a bag of cotton, under curious eyes. He went on two or three hundred miles. He was familiar, by this time, with a hundred kinds of farming country. He had seen corn, wheat, orchards, and melon patches. He knew sweet potato vines, and gubers—peanuts. He had crossed market gardens and fields burned over to give forage for cattle, tender young grass shoots. He was surprized to find so much to eat growing along the way.

Jim was honest. He now and again cracked a hickory nut or pecan, picked wild berries and fruit under roadside trees. But he never crossed a fence to help himself. He didn't beg for something to eat, but asked for work to earn a meal. Sometimes large-hearted people refused the work, but invited him in to eat of their largess and bounty. At other times, he had worked all the afternoon for two corn pones greased with cold hoglard. One night he slept in an abandoned cabin, in a clearing among the pines. After breakfast, in the next clearing, it chanced he mentioned where he slept.

"What—what, strangeh! Yo' all slept theh, in that next cabin up the road?" the man gasped, and assured of the truth of it, asked, "an yo' didn't get to see nawthin' 'tall?"

"Why, quails whistling this morning, a snake crawling in under the porch, somebody's hogs rooting over by the woods, that's all!"

"They ain' nobody slept in that house, not in ten years!" the man shook his head, "'tain't a place anybody around here'd sleep. Nope! Huh!"

"Why not?" Jim inquired.

"Huh!" the man shook his head. "'Tain't fur down to the nex' town. Yo' betteh git to amble on, jes' a step!"

Jim had trespassed, somehow. He asked no more questions. The next town was seven hours' lonely walk distant, but Jim knew the frailties of those who pass strangers on into the next county. He remembered, on the way, that the door of the cabin he slept in had been broken down, and that the front of it was dotted with a hundred bullet holes, which had torn the splinters in the back. Broken furniture was scattered there. He wondered. He would never know the story of that cabin.

A traveler never does know much about the places he passes. Sometimes, in a bend of the road, Jim would have an odd sensation. Looking around he would see the culled forest timber, overhead the lacery of long-leaved branches against a serene sky, and beneath his feet the red clay that was so wonderful in the sunshine. He came into stretches of black-loam lands, and sandy soils, varied clays and shaped up hills and river bottoms. He felt the richness of undeveloped, even unasked nature where it would be prodigal. When he came to settlements, he sometimes felt hostile gaze or cool indifference. He worked a while in a log camp. He could lift, lug, set a chain dog, flop boards. Presently he went on. Despite rough going his step had become light, his gait a long swinging lope. His mind had grown with his traveling. Back in the mill he had been a plodding toiler. He had begun work so early in the morning and carried on till so late in the day that a dead weight of weariness bedraggled his faculties. Only the spinnings and weavings, the windings and the shuttlings, the myriad running of interminable threads, each one of supreme importance in the fabric, had quickened and clarified his eyes.

Jim Farest's eyes were wonderfully bright, clear and strong. If they had been dull in the beginning of his work, the practice of watching threads, down to the single lints of cotton, a hair of wool, or a strand of silk had quickened his perception, making the brain behind them fill the fine, shapely cavity within his handsome head. His glance followed the wires of fences into far perspectives. His look ran up trees and followed the ramifications of branches and twigs out to the tips. He looked into the ruts of the clay ahead of him, and he noticed the tracks of narrow buggy wheels, of wagons, of flivver tires and wide power trucks that had laid a tracery pattern up and down the highway.

He could see curious indentations that had shaped the highway, without having left any individual or distinct track, as for example the curious pattern left when a thousand head of cattle had gone down the way, their hooves puncturing a film of thin shower-mud on the surface, leveling wheel ruts and making the roadway oddly neat and regular.

The youth who had never known the glory or the loveliness of nature, in town-boy ignorance, saw the delicate veins of flower petals, the frames of oak and cottonwood leaves, the myriad serrations of pine needles and grass in its thousands of species, from the deadly fox-tail to the lucious and rich curly grass. Those eyes that had seen distinctly each and every one of ten thousand threads hurtling through the spinners and looms now saw the minute fascinations of the Master Weaver of flowers and trees, and he saw that the dogs of his country, in the up-state New York, had thicker stands of hair and warmer coats than those of the Southern Ozarks, where it wasn't so cold. His eyes remarked that the hair of some cattle was fine and smooth, while that of other was coarse and ugly.

A great awakening was in the soul of Jim Farest. He had been reared in a noisy, homely, mean and sordid community, a mill town, where the business of living was a scramble and a heartache, where life was a hard grasping and grabbing, amid steaming dyes that were stenches and where the swarming children were screaming, unlovely creatures, among whom some fine and inspired youngsters showed, however, how wonderful even boys and girls can be amid noisome surroundings.

Jim Farest was conscious of a lot of things. When he went through some communities, merry greetings came to him from school yards. In others the teeth-showing boys, grinning, would wait till he had gone by and then throw stones after him, or clods, or wormy apples, anything they could lay their hands on.

The stroller, who never had had much time to think, since he must watch running threads so closely, now thought all day long, just one tumultuous idea after another. He watched as closely as ever. The habit was upon him. He could no more miss the blood-red vein of a cactus petal than he could miss the roadway that led to the horizon ahead of him, vanishing in perspective across a prairie saucer basin.

Villages and cities had been close together at the beginning of his travels. He liked towns, because he knew community life. Gradually the six or seven miles interval between towns extended to eight and ten, and as he grew stronger, became a better walker, he was hardly aware of the widened spaces. But away down here where the pine forests faded out in cedar, and then became mesquite, he suddenly realized what he unconsciously had recorded in his memory. The towns had become settlements, fifty miles apart, and the houses, the ranches and farms, were five, ten miles apart.

He entered a region where the road meandered along, cutting across from hill to hill. The long curvings of the two-rut way delighted his eyes. He noted that the slope of the hills, the outlines of trees, the lift or sag of the branches, the very sway of the flowering shrubs and plant stalks along the roadway were in curving lines. In all nature he did not see one straight, ugly line. Instead of one raw color by the thousands of yards of darting fabric, amid the roar of cogs, the slap of belts, the squeal of one ungreased pulley, the throb of heavy machinery, he had such a pattern of unstudied grace and beauty of hue and shade as he had never dreamed of, while the place of oils and steams was taken by the sweet of honey and aromas of perfumes blended by the passing winds, which had a tang of the north in them as autumn fell—not exactly the fragrance of young flowers, of moist spring, but the tang of asters and golden rods, the ripe dry fervor of drying-up vegetation which has stored the vitamines for sentient things to feed upon during the winter season.

Jim Farest entered upon a land where the stalks of plants were scattering, and the earth between was bare and caked, or loose and dusty. He learned, by thirsty experience, the distance between water holes. He came upon the thick milkiness of smooth, unsatisfying alkali. He swung a canteen on his pack, at last, to bridge the gaps of thirsty land. He became aware of a vast change in the country, as he left the sod and forest behind, and entered upon this strange desolation of thorns and thirst, of distances that seemed but an hour's walk away—and were all day tramps, in stinging sunshine, ending in the cold, dry grip of enveloping frosty wind.

He felt a certain nervousness in this country. He wondered what it was. He found himself walking on his toes. He took long jumps. He trotted along. He burst into songs, which the girls had sung at the work in the big mill, some quite unlovely songs among them. He would stop on a slope of broken rock, crossed by the highway, and perched on a flat stone, he would look down upon barren flat or up to mountain height, or across to islanded peaks beyond great lakes that he learned had no existence, his feelings disturbed by the strange emotions that surged within him.

He had never been in love. Away back in his years there had been a girl who never looked at him, whose prettiness had hurt his heart, when he thought of her—and yet he had kept on thinking about her. He would probably never forget Belle Breslieu. Now he had the same passion for the vast desert, a lovely, unspeakable, glorious presence which seemed unattainable, and yet here he was. He remembered learning about the Sahara Desert. Why hadn't they taught him desert was like this?

He tramped on along the wandering thread of highway. Sometimes he was two days going from one town to the next. Sometimes, out from some clump of mountains a man would come riding on horseback, a figure out of romance, out of books, out of motion pictures—a cowboy, with rope and saddle, even with revolver and, particularly, with wide-brimmed hat. The rider would come by him. The native would stare at Jim with cold, implacable countenance, perhaps an old man's wrinkled up face, perhaps a boy's round, apple-pink cheeked face, with those squinting, pinpoint, curious eyes.

"Who are you?" one would ask with lifting nose and rubbery lips.

"Who all mout yo' be, strangeh?" another would inquire.

Jim replied with exact information. A nod of disbelief would come from one, and a grin of comprehension from another. On a number of occasions fine hospitality insisted that he come over to the place to sit in. Thus he had night's lodging, or even a week, on several occasions. And then again he knew that he was unwelcome, that he was suspect, and that hostile eyes watched him till the scuffle of the dust where he stepped had receeded to the horizon of the watchers.

The first he knew of Redbone was a whittled hand from a packing box board, with a scrawl of letters on it:

REDBONE, 39 Mils

Another board on the same stake pointed along the other fork in the highway. It said:

QUILLPLANT, 48 Milles

There was really no choice in the appearance of the highways. Both led toward shimmering cream-colored valleys of enormous dimensions, and in either direction there were pale blue heights of mountain clumps, like islands rising in the midst of glistening silvery seas. As thirty-nine miles was nine miles less than forty-eight miles, Jim Farest turned to the left. He did not know that the real distance was sixty-seven miles to Redbone, and forty-eight miles to Quillplant. Redbone wanted the "towerist traffic," and would lie to obtain it. Quillplant didn't care a whoop whether travelers came to it or not, and nobody bothered to correct the Redbone lie.

All that afternoon Jim strode on. He went on tramping in the cool of the night. Presently he went out from the highway, sat down to eat a lunch in the darkness, and rolled up his blanket and tarp. He slept a fine sleep. He was awakened by coyotes and enjoyed their wails. In the morning he ate and drank a little. Toward noon the sun was pretty hot. He was right thirsty. He grew hungry. Thus it happened, thinking Redbone could not be far away, he ate his grub and drank a little more water than he might have done, had he not believed that lying sign.

When night fell, the desert stretched before him. The trail ruts soon disappeared, dissipated by the fluttering strata of the air. He kept to them. Reckoning up, he knew he had walked some twenty hours, and the vacant waste stretched interminably before him as the sun went down.

"I must of come forty miles!" he thought to himself, listening to hear his watch tick, a loud sound in the silence.

He could see twenty miles across that alkali flat, with no sign of a town in it.

Doggedly, he buckled down to the task, and tramped all night long. He was on a spur of a clump of mountains of broken stone, with only wisps of tiny bushes here and there to indicate any living thing. He could see ahead to another mountain, miles on miles distant, a bare, pale valley between. Behind him were wastes and desolations. He had no food. He had but a swallow of water in his canteen.

Sitting on a stone, he rested while the sun came warm upon his back. His lips were cracked and sore. His eyes were smarting, his head ached, and weariness was in his muscles. The back of his neck felt like a lump of cobblestone. Yet he looked at the flaring colors of the passing sunrise. He was weary, but not dismayed. Back home he would never have dreamed of such an adventure as this. A curious elation to think that he had reached this place took hold of him. He was untouched by a feeling of anything but satisfaction, so far as his mind was concerned. His physique might be having quite a hard time of it, but not his spirit.

Presently he swung up his thirty-pound pack and went on. He beat the footing with a kind of measured pound, stepping to a whistling, humming refrain in his throat:

"Rum-tummy-tum-tummy tum-m
  Oh, rummytummytum-tummy-tum-m,
Rum-tummy-tum-tummy-tum-m
  Oh, rummytummytum-tummy-tum-m"

When his eyes fogged, when his knees trembled as they bent under his weight, and when he could no longer walk straight but reeled along, he found himself carried along by that endless record that ran on and on with no volition of his own, after the initial impulse that developed it to the needs of his step. He just kept going. Redbone was somewhere ahead. He could not have lost his way, for there was no roadfork.

Yet a despairing doubt, which was not unhappy, just bewildering, rested upon his tired and throbbing brain. He had come for hours, days, he would probably never arrive anywhere. He was too tired to go any farther, but he kept on. He was thirsty, but not so hungry as he had been. A pebble in his mouth was something to keep it from being too unbearable—that ashy feeling of dying fire.

Sometimes he thought the day was ending in night. He looked at the sun to make sure that it was still in the sky. Once or twice he argued with himself, whether it was the sun or the moon. He had never seen a red day, before. The landscape at first was a pink, and then a royal purple, like the shadows of clouds and stones, which he had noticed the day before, for the first time. Now the earth was a royal purple color, red as pigeon blood.

Night really came, and Jim Farest suddenly became aware of lights ahead, of a town, in fact. There it was just over the low divide in the mountains he had noticed as he left the other clump that morning. This, then, must be Redbone.

Water, first. He could not be sure in his memory where he found water. He drank some, filled his canteen, and then went to a lunch room, where he sat at a table, whispering to the slim waiter that he wanted coffee, and something to eat. He ate something, drank the coffee, and stumbled out again into the night. That he remembered. What next happened he could not tell. He just knew he slept, and such a grateful sleep as only the dead-tired, who have by sheer summoning of the last reserve of spirit used up the body, know the full joy of and never forget.

He was summoned out of his rest into wakefulness. Day had come again. He was in a shack-town. 'Dobe and weather-beaten lumber had been used in various proportions. The mud was much more beautiful than the wood. But local taste had preferred for the new city hall thin boards and small scantlings. Toward this building Jim Farest was propelled vigorously, while yet he was being awakened from a deep, sound sleep.

When he managed to look over his shoulder as he stumbled along, prodding in the small of his back and sides hurting painfully, he looked into the grizzled, wrinkled, beaked face of a curiously savage man, City Marshal Dobane, who was grinning with his loosely hung lips, showing crooked fangs badly stained by tobacco and food, and yet substantial and undecayed. The city official's eyes were as malignant as a rattlesnake's, as if he took pleasure in thus poisoning the young man's awakening.

One feature of the city hall of Redbone was substantial. A cage had been built to hold prisoners. This was a room of concrete and steel plates surrounding a cage of tempered steel bars. In the City Marshal's office the officer went through Jim's pockets, and felt for a money belt, too. He found the store of money Jim always carried, and counted $34.63. He made a note of the exact figure on a slip of paper, so he wouldn't forget it. He examined Jim's watch, too, squinting at the name under the crystal, and then looking at the works, which were full jeweled. The case, he observed, was "14 karat gold." He put that into his pocket.

Having emptied Jim's pockets, the city marshal shoved him into the empty cage, clanging the grated gate shut. There was no chair in the cage. Jim was obliged, through weariness, to sit on the steel plate floor, while the marshal went around to the city judge's private office. He handed the judge the slip of paper and said:

"Feller I found sleepin' over'n the corral, into a bale of alfalfy. Snipsy, 't the lunch, tipped me he'd come in—showed his wad. Huh!"

"Sober?"

"Yeh!"

"We'll 'range 'im, then."

"Aw-right, Judge! Nice watch, too—I'll give 'm five f'r it!"

"All right, Marshal!"

Pete Cantone, presiding judge of the court of Redbone entered the large courtroom. With slow dignity, he sauntered to the bench. When he had subsided into his chair, he looked out upon some nineteen citizens of Redbone, grinning in anticipation. Word had gone around town that the city marshal had picked up a suspicious character, who would presently face the court of criminal procedure. Judge Pete would sure make it interesting.

City Marshal Dobane brought in Jim, who was carrying his pack, and the pack had been thoroughly undone, and not repacked.

"Well, Marshal, what have we here?"

"James Farest, twenty-seven years old, no religion, no home, weaver and spinner by oc'pation, born in N'York. Claims he walked here,——"

"W'ich is a prepost'rous lie, on the face of it!" the judge sniffed, looking on the wrong side of the table bench for the cuspidor. "W'at charge ag'in 'im Mr. Marshal?"

"Loiterin', tresspassin' on the Redbone Stockyards Company prem'ses, vi'lation Section 243, Redbone Ord'nances, an' resistin' of'cer of the law. I ketched 'im asleep, 'r he might of be'n bad."

Everybody grinned.

"Any arms?"

"Well, no firearms," the city marshal admitted, "he had a bad knife, though—whetted to a razor edge."

"Um-m," the judge mumbled, looking at the slip of paper, "Well, James Farest, y' have heard the charges against you. Yo' got a right to consult a lawyer—" A slick little man stirred forward hopefully—"or yo' kin plead to the charges, guilty or not guilty?"

"Why, Judge, I just came to town last night—I was dead tired. I must have fallen asleep."

"Guilty or not guilty!" shouted the judge angrily, pounding the desk. "We want to know 'f you admit you slept in the stock company's corral, if you vi'lated Section 243 of the city ordinances, an' did you dispute the author'ty of our city marshal here?"

Jim Farest had never been arrested before. He knew nothing about legal procedure. He could not remember the events of the past thirty-six hours at all clearly. He realized that he had dropped asleep somewhere and that trespass was a tangible offense. As he hesitated, the Judge explained in cold, precise terms:

"You c'n plead not guilty, an' claim a jury trial. That means enormous expense to this city and district, an' on the first charge ag'in yo' a verdict of guilty carries with it a possible fine of one thousand dollars and six months in jail; the second three months in jail an' a fine of five hundred dollars; in this place, resisting an officer may bring a penalty of two years in prison an' five thousand dollars fine. Fines are served out at the rate of one dollar per day, working on the improvements."

There was nothing in the Court's honorable bearing to indicate that the culprit, so found guilty by his peers, would not exact full penalty for each and every count as charged.

"Or yo' kin trust to the mercy an' discretion of the co'rt!" Judge Pete Cantone added, in a round, ringing voice, full of pathos and understanding. "Yo' kin plead guilty, er stand trial. That's your predicament."

Sweat gathered on Jim's forehead. He glanced around, seeing only the implacable, coal-eyed gaze of the constituted authorities, and the grinning, gum-chewing expectant delight of the spectators.

"I never was arrested before—I don't know—" Jim exclaimed.

"Are you guilty as charged, or not?" Judge Pete demanded, angrily. "Do yo' insult the character and integrity of this co'rt or not?"

"Why—of course—I know it's all right!" Jim gasped.

"Plea of guilty admitted," Judge Pete remarked, softly. "In view of the previous good record of the accused, and as this is the first offense against the majesty of the law by the culprit, the court is inclined to be lenient. Charge of resisting the officer held in abeyance. Charge of trespassing dismissed. Vi'lation Section 243 of Redbone City Ord'nances, serious offense against the community, calls for a reasonable penalty. The decision is thirty dollars fine. Let's see—marshal's fees, $9.63."

City Marshal Dobane stepped up to the table, and deposited $34.63, the watch and jacknife on the bench. Jim looked at the money. He knew less about his finances than the city authorities.

"You got $34.63," Judge Pete remarked "and a watch. The policy of the city court is to confiscate deadly weapons, to wit, this knife."

"Well, no hard feelings, if he did resist arrest," the marshal grinned. "I'd give five dollars to 'comodate him for the watch."

"Why, that's fine and friendly, Marshal!" the judge beamed, astonished at the magnanimity of the peace officer. "The cash and the watch just exactly make up the amount of the fine, young man. I'll say, you are a lucky man, to have the money—the watch'll make up whatever the officer's fees are. He'll risk it's not being any good, y'know."

Jim Farest nodded.

"Prisoner discharged!" Judge Pete said. "Y' c'n go."

"Better keep movin' too," the marshal suggested in a low voice.

Jim, dragging the pack by the shoulder straps, went down the aisle to the courtroom door, and out into the street of dust and sunshine. As he hesitated on the balcony porch, he heard behind him a low but carrying voice:

"By ——, yo' know, the judge'll fair make the price an' cost of this here new courthouse, if y' give 'im a chanct! That makes two hundred an' ten dollars, he's c'lected this month, so far! I tell y', Pete's a good man in office——"

"An' Dobane sure works with him!" another voice said.

Jim Farest turned on along the street, toward the city limits, five miles beyond the last house. He swung his pack to his back, and fairly dog-trotted along. He would likely be put on the chain gang to work the streets, or something, if he tarried. He hesitated to fill his canteen at a hydrant where horses drank, but the desert ahead warned him, and a few minutes later he was plodding along with quick, nervous, trying steps, his head throbbing, and his stomach hungry.

Four hours later, when he was faint with hunger, nerve-wrack and hurt, he rounded a point of rock. Along the side-valley slope of the gorge he entered, grew cactus, mesquite and considerable other vegetation. The bottom of the V-slopes had a thicket of near-trees along it. The roadway was a cut-bank, along the slide. Nearly starved, he smelled something cooking and followed the breeze around into a draw, out of sight from the roadway. As he appeared four men sprang from around a fire where meat was broiling. They pulled revolvers on him, he threw and up his hands.

"Gentlemen!" he cried, "I'm hungry! Just a piece of something to eat, won't you please!"

The four looked at each other, sharply, then sized up this man in laced hunting boots, knickerbockers, army shirt and carrying a pack.

"All right, 'bo!" one replied. "Here, he'p yo'se'f!"

They handed him chunks of broiled beef, juicy and tender. They grinned, delighted, when he hastily brought out his sheet-iron tray, nickled, and his plate, knife, fork, salt-cellar and pepper box. They had no such fine fixings. They were mighty glad of the pepper, though, but had salt of their own. He told them his story, where he started, why, and how. He hesitated about talking of Redbone.

"Come through Redbone? 'Tain't none of my business," one inquired, casually.

"Yes, I came through Rebdone," Jim said, with asperity, and then as these were kindly, friendly men, he told them how he had stumbled and staggered into Redbone, hungry and thirsty, dead weary of that terrific tramp over the desert, and how he awakened a prisoner.

"That were an awful long thirty-nine miles!" Jim said, "I mean from the road forks——"

"Thirty-nine miles!" one of the men exclaimed, "It's a good seventy-five miles! They put that sign up to fool folks to come that way, tourists an' them kind. Then they got city laws to fine 'em for infractions. Why, that town lives on outsiders."

"Yes, I know!" Jim Farest exclaimed, with angry bitterness. "They made me pay thirty dollars toward their city hall—a fellow said so. I heard him. They took $4.63 for marshal's fees—and 'lowed me five dollars on a seventy-five-dollar watch!"

"That so? Would you all like to go back and get it?" one inquired.

"What do you mean—could I get the money back?" Jim asked.

"Sure you can!" one nodded. "Some risk to it. Same time——"

"You mean —" Jim blinked.

The four looked at him. They set their eyes. Their jaws came up sharply, as their hard, lean muscles drew firm. The wanderer looked into their faces. They had much the same expressions as City Marshal Dobane. Their features were like Judge Pete's. But these men had been kindly to him. They had fed him. In their features was something infinitely tender and yet bitter. They did not smile, the way Judge Pete and the City Marshal had smiled.

The two representatives of society had been petty thieves, having fun in their mean grafting. These men were desperate bandits. Jim Farest stood face to face with a temptation the most terrible he had ever confronted. He knew it was temptation. He was "wise," for he had traveled thousands of miles, meeting all kinds, understanding and realizing. The chance to get his money back was real. These boys had some project afoot to go into Rebdone and take—rob money there. He knew they were outlaws. For an instant, their sympathy and friendliness shook the foundations of his soul.

"I feel like going back!" he exclaimed, tears in his eyes, "I want to go with you, the worst way—but I can't do it boys! 'Tain't right—I mustn't do it."

"What you going to do?" one asked. "You're broke! On beyond here, I tell you, it's worse yet! Nothin' but jackrabbits and alkali! And some —— hard *hombres*, too, I'll tell yo'. You'd be a good one to ride with us! Yo' got the nerve—walkin' all them miles!"

"You see, boys, I couldn't!" Jim shook his head, "Those crooks cleaned me. That's so. I was so hungry I couldn't hardly lift my feet. Then I come into this valley, and it's sweet spring water. You know what that Redbone water is! And here was cold spring water, no alkali at all!"

"Yeh!"

"And you boys filled me up with beef—the best beef I ever ate!"

"Yeh—that's right."

"I feel better now. I feel all right. I'm not hungry. I'm not thirsty. If you hadn't fed me, prob'ly I'd wanted to go back with you."

"Did you notice the bank—pretty busy?" the leader changed the subject.

Jim Farest blinked. He turned to them spreading out his hands.

"Take my blanket, my tarp, these eating things, take my pack, all I got! But—but don't ask me—anything! I'd do anything for you, I owe you a heap, but I can't talk—tell those things. Don't you see, the way I look at things, it wouldn't be right!"

"Sure! Well, ——! All right! Here's some meat. We've lots of it. Keep mum about us, will you?"

"What you do is none of my business," Jim shook his head, as he went on.

Two days later, as he plodded on some fifty miles farther along that wonderful trail of deserts and mountains, toward night, he came to another town, on a railroad. This was Wistful, place of galvanized iron, brush roofs, and 'dobe. As he walked into it, the last of his beef gone, and his canteen dry, he was met by a gray, smiling man, as like Marshal Dobane as could be, and yet kindly, friendly, full of understanding.

"Yo' name Jim Farest?" Sheriff Deswin inquired.

"Yes, sir," Jim replied, surprized.

"Let's go over and have a bite," Deswin suggested, and over the little table in a clean eating house, the wondering wanderer sat down to a regular dinner.

"I—I can't pay for it, Sheriff!" Jim said, his eyes hungry.

"That's all right," Deswin smiled. "This is on the county. I just wish you'd sort of tell me which way you come, who you saw—all about yo' trip from where yo' started back East, right plumb to Wistful."

Jim told his story. Deftly the sheriff interpolated questions, to get matters straight. When he told of his tramp across the desert to Redbone, Deswin nodded, saying:

"Yes, suh, my son! I know jes' how thusty and hongry yo' was. I be'n so myse'f. What' happened in Redbone?"

Sweat gathered on Farest's forehead. He told it quietly enough. He stopped eating, though still hungry. He stared at something beyond the table toward which his eyes were directed. In a low voice he told the story of his awakening under arrest, and the step-by-step of the legal proceedings.

"They did that to you?" Deswin asked, gently, "An' so that's the way they're paying for that new co'rt house—Huh! When you left Redbone, how'd yo' come?"

"I followed the road."

"That's nigh a hundred miles, son!" Deswin observed. "A long hard trail. What'd yo' eat?"

"Why I—I had some cactus buds and the insides the stalks—first along. And then—then——"

"Some fellers give you beef enough?"

"Oh, yes. Why—" Farest blinked, looking away. In the eyes of the sheriff of Wistful was a poniard, boring keenness. His face was not so tender, though it was sympathetic.

"Now, son!" the man said. "Just yo' tell me about those men. I must know. Yo' ain't no idee how important it is that yo' tell me the truth."

Jim Farest shrank. He withered beneath that searching demand.

"My God, Sheriff! Those men were good to me. They give me meat when I was starving. I don't care a —— what they done! They fed me, I tell you!"

"Yes, I know," the man nodded. "At the same time, you can trust me. I've fed you, too, and you were hungry. I never fed no man who was hungrier than you—nobody who ate so much."

"Yes, sir! That's so!" Jim admitted, the sweat beading his forehead. "I want to do what's right. I—I wouldn't be here, if I hadn't. I told those boys who fed me what they done to me in Redbone. I could of— What you want to know for?"

"They said you could go back and get your money again?"

"Yes, but how'd you—I——"

"That's what I wanted to know," the sheriff of Wistful nodded, and turned to the telephone on the restaurant desk.

"Give me City Marshal Dobane of Redbone," he spoke into the instrument, and Jim Farest wilted at that request. "That you, Dobane? Yes, this is Wistful, Deswin talking. That feller come in here 'bout two hours ago. Farest, yeh! You're on the wrong track. He come through the spring cañon, like you said, but all he had to eat was cactus blossoms and that kind of stuff. He was —— near starved when he got here.

"Let me tell you; the next time you scoundrels in Redbone abuse a man, and rob him the way you did that boy, the decent people of this part of the country are going to advertise you from salt water to the planet of Mars. You sent that man out into the desert to starve. That don't go.

"If you got any idee yo' want any business with me, personally, for tellin' yo' yo're a scoundrel, an' a blackguarding thief, I'll come to Redbone. . . . Oh, that so? All right. That young feller's with me now. I'm waitin' while yo' send him a contribution of $34.63—he's broke, needs the money. . . . Yeh! I'm tellin' yo'! An' say, if yo' don't send his watch, I'll swear out a warrant, an' come get yo' an' it, too. Get me? We folks is plumb sick of the repytation yo' scoundrels is givin' this part the country! All right. Yo' git that money an' watch an' jacknife here by the stage an' railroad."

The Wistful officer clicked his teeth as he hung up.

"Right long, hard, mean walking," he said to Jim. "But I'm shore glad yo' kept a walkin', 'stead of ridin' into Redbone with that gang. Yo' see, they was bad. Two was killed. The others got away with $19,000. They was looking for yo' right sharp, course. Yo' heard what I said. Now a friend of mine, who lives down south here a ways has quite a place. Nice, honorable man. Got some cattle—'bout nine thousand head. Always got a place for another man in his bunkhouse. If yo'd like a job, all right. I think I could prob'ly put yo' down there.

"Yo're man grown, but same time, yo're just a boy yet. Yo've come a long way. Yo've seen a lot of the country. That's all right. Good idea—if yo' don't carry it too far. Yo've been getting along purty far enough. Time yo' settled down a while. Capt. Marfy's a first class man. Yo'll learn the cattle business under him. Yo' better go down there an' work a while—hard work, course! Same time——"

"Yes, sir!" Jim nodded, as the man hesitated, "I see—I understand. Lately, I haven't had any job. Not since back in the oil country. Well, which way is it—I'll start——"

"Good idee—only not now," the county sheriff shook his head. "Yo' better go to bed. Yo're tired, and need the sleep. Captain'll be up tomorrow, which is Saturday; I noticed a lot of supplies for him at the railroad a while ago. He'll be into town to get it. Yo' c'n go back with him. I know he'll be just proud to have you with him, when I tell him 'bout that roast beef, back there in the gulch. I know all about it. You must of had mighty good training—that yo' didn't go back afteh the money they stole off'n yo', them Redbone scoundrels. Some day, they'll be cleaned, too. Don't yo' worry about that. Now we'll turn over here— 'Taint much of a house for looks, but the bed's good. Right theh—I'll see yo' in the mornin', sometime Good night!"

SHELL MONEY

by J. D. Newsom

NOT so very long ago shell money was still in use among the natives of the Banks Islands, a small group north of the New Hebrides in the western Pacific. In itself the custom is not especially noteworthy, for it occurs among other savage people the world over In the Banks, however, the making of shell money is a specialized industry, restricted to the inhabitants of one single island: Uraparapara.

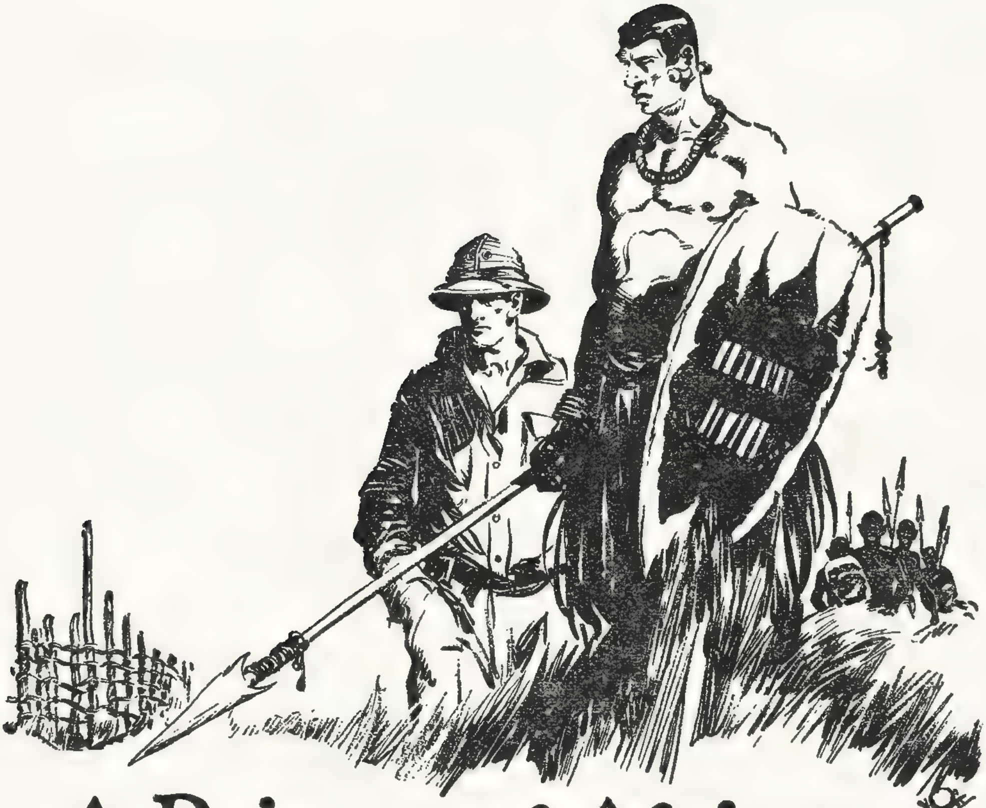
The population of Uraparapara spent its days chipping off the bases of small conchs, polishing, boring and stringing them together in fathom lengths. It was tedious work and they had little or no time to devote to agriculture or fishing.

The islanders were never in want, for their money was in great demand and was readily exchanged for tubers, pigs, canoes and spears, in fact anything and everything they desired.

Then the strings went into circulation and were used to pay the initiation fees into secret societies, or to purchase brides, tuskers or other desirable commodities. The strings depreciated in value as the shells wore out and the makers on Uraparapara were kept busy overtime.

This rudimentary treasury has now closed down. Today the inhabitants of the island are probably extremely lean and hungry. It is doubtful whether silver shillings, paper francs, or whatever currency they now use has retained the magic of the old shell money drawn, fathom upon fathom, from a great basket and offered with awful solemnity by the novice to the tribal elders to pay for the safety of his soul at the lodge of his fathers.

They use checks, I suppose—so much quicker, don't you know!



A Prince of Africa

A Complete Novelette

by T. Samson Miller

Author of "Obei," "Niger Witches," etc

PEERING across the pampass islands in the Upper Niger Robert Chatteris made out the outlines of sheet-iron sheds bulking against the stars. He slipped into a hip pocket a revolver which he had held since sundown on the ten Nupe who poled the dugout. Sunup to sundown constituted the West African working day.

Robert had been unable to make it plain in the dialect that this was an occasion when ancient custom had to be broken. Hence the persuasion of the gun. Robert's fellow passenger—an old troubadour in a ragged burnoose and turban—took encouragement from the disappearance of the gun to twang his gilau and resume a long tale anent a fabulous ivory treasure of El Nadir.

Let scoffers say the age of romance is dead and that such wonders as Seven League Boots are purely mythical. Only eight weeks ago Robert had turned up a gem in the Positions Vacant columns of the London *Times:*

> "Important Position and Splendid Opportunity in tropical Africa is open to young gentleman possessed of initiative and resource, and preferably a university graduate."

In purely playful mood Robert wrote that in as much as Oxford University had done its worst to make a Rhodes Scholar out of a Rhodes Athlete from Montana he was now free to play the sucker, but it was his acute observation that Important Positions and Splendid Opportunities did not have to advertise for applicants.

This piece of frolicksome impudence resulted in an interview with a Sir George Marsden, in the mahogany office of a marble and granite pile in London, which flew the flag of the Royal Sokoto Company—a hippo recumbent and a black in a G-string in the lower left corner of the British Merchant Ensign.

Sir George said Robert's letter showed originality, which was synonymous with initiative and resource. In the end Robert took a sporting chance and signed an agreement that ran to thirty-seven clauses and which hog-tied him to the company's sphere of influence for three years at a salary that wouldn't have tempted a dishwasher.

But Robert took a second sporting chance on a verbal promise of a bonus commensurate with proved ability. Taking sporting chances evidently ran in the Chatteris family, for his father cabled from Montana his willingness to go his son's bond to the tune of ten thousand dollars.

Landed at the company's shipping port in the pestilential Niger Delta, Robert found six lackadaisical cases of tropikitis and so little evidence of splendid opportunity that, suspecting he had been badly stung, he developed a keen inquisitiveness in affairs.

What does the senior agent, Price, do but report to Agent General McNair that young Chatteris shows a keen interest and is altogether promising material. McNair invites the promising material to dine aboard his stern-wheeler for a sizing-up. But the high opinion which Robert had flukily acquired with Sir George Marsden had been passed on to Africa.

"Rhodes Scholar from Montana," Hugh McNair had cooed. "Father a cattleman, I understand," he added, as if that accounted for Robert's lythe six feet, the sharp fling of his dark head, and alert brown eyes that caught meaning's ahead of McNair's sentences. Robert was handed what McNair called "the plum of the service" right off the bat.

"You will take the launch *Guara* and proceed with all possible dispatch to relieve Frederick Bayliss, agent at N'doni. Lose no time, for Bayliss sent down word that he is in a bad way with fever."

Robert had left the blacks of the *Guara*, which was grounded for the hundredth time, with orders to get the launch afloat and wait Bayliss. He had transferred to the Nupe dugout.

The instant the canoe slushed the beach at the trading station, Robert hurled himself ashore and headed for an outside gangway to living quarters over a huge barter store, whilst his Jekri boy gathered his kit and prepared to follow. He was frightened that he might be too late.

His sympathy for Bayliss construed the groundings of the launch and the sulky poling of the Nupe into charges on his conscience. But when he bounded up the gangway his fears were relieved by hiccoughing and retchings from a room off a spacious room that evidently served as a combination office and choproom. Bayliss was alive, anyway. Robert shot to the bedroom.

Robert had expected an emaciated victim of fever, sweating under blankets. Bayliss was lying dressed on top of the blankets. He was a tubby man about forty with small features, lank tawny hair parted in the middle and a drooping mustache of the same hue.

"——! I thought you'd never get here," whined Bayliss. "The tomtoms drummed two days ago of a pucka-pucka—launch—on the river."

Robert flushed as if Bayliss had charged him with careless tardiness. But he said nothing. The man was sick, and therefore to be excused. Yet it was hard to think of Bayliss as a sick man. In fact the pulsing sympathy with which Robert had charged across the compound to the gangway of a few moments ago had strangely vanished.

"It's kick-out quick or kick-in with me," Bayliss wheezed.

His small blue eyes furtively quizzed Robert's face and then shied off to nowhere, and never once in the business that followed did Robert meet those eyes in a square look.

Just as Robert was taking thought that Bayliss was exaggerating his sickness an opportune fit of hiccoughing seized the agent. Robert's sympathies flooded back.

"We'll have to get you away as quickly as possible, old chap," he commiserated.

A consternating thought struck Bayliss, or seemed to strike him.

"You'll want to take stock. ——! Eight large sheds packed to the roofs. Stuff has been piling up all through the dry season, waiting the rains and deep water for shipment. It's a furnace under those sheet-iron roofs."

He pulled himself to a sitting posture with apparent effort and put his legs over the side of the bed to the floor.

"I've got everything shipshape—the balance sheets all ready for signing over."

"Kick-out or kick-in," thought Robert. The stocktaking might finish Bayliss. He had to think of that.

"The agent general said you'd better come away as quickly as the transfer could be effected," Robert mused thoughtfully.

Suddenly his face smiled and he made a movement as of squaring his shoulders on a decision.

"Hang it, old chap, we can't be pikers in a case like this."

He was thinking of a certain *esprit de* company, of the large and trustful way he had been staked by Marsden, Price and McNair.

"We can go over things generally tonight, for you can not leave till morning. The Nupe who will take you down to the *Guara* are played out."

"I'm not taking the river route," Bayliss returned without a pause. "I couldn't stand it. I've a litter ready. I intend slipping 'cross country and catching the Liverpool boat at Sierre Leone."

He moved as he spoke to the other room.

Robert followed, kicking himself over a feeling that Bayliss took too much for granted. Then his eyes fell on balance and stock sheets, spread on a table, with Bayliss' signature already affixed. As he ran a glance down the items on the stock sheets he said in his thoughts—

"It's all too cut and dried, but the poor fellow is so anxious to be off home that he doesn't realize what he is asking of me."

His eyes were arrested by an item on the sheets which he had not expected to encounter in a land of barter exchange.

"Five thousand pounds in silver currency?" he read aloud.

Bayliss pointed to five strong cases, about two feet by one, in a corner, explaining:

"I was to accustom the natives to currency. But I haven't felt up to a job that will buck custom and prejudice. Better see that the seals are intact."

Robert stepped to the cases. The pupils of Bayliss' eyes expanded with excited anxiety on Robert's back. His body shed its affected langor, becoming tense and rigid. He drew a corner of his mustache into his mouth and chewed it with a painful nervousness.

Robert observed that steel bands bound the ends of the cases, and a stout wire ran around each case four ways, the jointures bearing the large red seals of the company intact. He nodded an O. K., and turned swiftly to the table, but not so swiftly but that Bayliss hadn't time to drop his tensed attitude for that of a listless, hiccoughing victim of fever. Then he began retching. His body was convulsed with spasms.

ROBERT hesitated not a moment to dash his signature under Bayliss' on the balance sheets and duplicates. Bayliss grabbed the latter, and stowed them in an inner pocket as he moved on groggy legs to a balcony and clapped his hands. Four bearers with a litter popped from an outhouse, as if they had been waiting the signal, and ran to the foot of the gangway, just as Robert's Jekri boy was bringing up his kit. Robert pointed the Jekri to the room which Bayliss had just vacated.

"Put my stuff in there, Omo, and bring out this massa's—" he indicated Bayliss with a side movement of his head—"bags."

But Bayliss, going down the gangway, said over his shoulder that he had sent his baggage on when the drums reported the launch coming. It struck Robert that had he insisted on taking stock the baggage would be a week or more ahead of Bayliss. He was nettled by the exposure that Bayliss had calculated ahead on his generous trust in signing blind. But as he followed the groggy figure down the gangway he let sympathy drown the criticism.

A cracked croon broke from a burnoosed figure squatted at the foot of the gangway. The troubadour had followed Robert and taken up a strategic position, in hope of a present. He sang the same tale of the El Nadir ivory treasure that Robert had heard aboard the dugout. But then he had been under the strain of watching the mutinous Nupe and anxiety over Bayliss. His mind was now free to remember something.

"Say, Bayliss, the agent general, in a talk on conditions up here, said something about this tale of treasure, and also about a trade treaty with El Nadir. I got the idea that a fat bonus was coming to the agent who secured the treaty or the ivory. I didn't get it straight. McNair only hinted. Guess he wasn't assuming any responsibility. At times I thought he was spoofing me about the ivory treasure. You haven't made any dicker with the Emir of El Nadir, eh?"

"No." A pause, then Bayliss went on slowly, as if he were feeling his way. "Old Emir Abwol—the Hyena, he was called—wouldn't have any truck with whites. He died only last month. I haven't had a chance to tackle the new Emir, Abwol's son, Kolo. He came from the Gold Coast last week. Been down there picking up an education of a sort."

"Well, but is there anything in this tale of ivory treasure?" Robert asked, a bit irritated by something reserved in Bayliss' manner.

Bayliss wigwagged his right hand on a level with his helmet, as if saying the thing wasn't worth talking about, and sharply turned to another subject.

"I'd get the hang of things, Chatteris, before I let loose the silver coins, if I were you. The blacks are terribly superstitious of anything new."

"Thanks," said Robert, warming to the one and only consideration Bayliss had shown, and no thought of sinister motive in the advice disturbed his first night's joy and pride in his little kingdom of two acres of packed sheds and double rows of barracks for the African help.

He was on the balcony at dawn, watching the muster of a small army of clerks, rivermen, watchmen, cooperers, interpreters and the raising of the Company's flag, when his Jekri came and drew his attention to something he had found in the bedroom. Robert's eyes froze on a new-minted silver threepenny piece on Omo's black palm.

His brain reeled back from the coin as if it were deadly. A ghastly voice within him protested that all the coin in that part of the country was sealed in five strong cases.

Next moment he was down on his knees beside the cases and examining the seals and wires with microscopic eyes. The seals passed the closest scrutiny. Of a sudden his heart missed a beat at sight of a nail-head that failed to flush with one of the end bands. He detected faint scratches on the band. A thief with lots of time and no fear of being disturbed could have drawn the nails from the band and tease out an end of a case without disturbing the sealed wire.

He bawled panickly to Omo to get an ax or hatchet—anything.

Panic! He might have hot-footed after Bayliss when the first case opened showed five slack sacks. But by then he was in a fever to know how much had been taken. Five thousand pounds—twenty-five thousand dollars—in equal amounts of threepenny and sixpenny pieces! Three hundred thousand tiny silver coins! A smoking brain, nervous fingers!

He tried stacking the coins in twenties and facilitating the count, but owing to their smallness and their milled edges and his unsteady fingers the piles could not be made to stand. The count kept getting fogged in the smokes in his brain. Sir George Marsden, Price, Hugh McNair! He had fallen down on them all.

Excuses? The company did not listen to excuses. A man had his chance; if he failed to make good he was sent down to the delta port, to drivel out his three-year term in rubber boots, knee deep in primeval ooze, at "nigger driving," without hope of bonus. His bond! Robert's heart went sick. If a call on dad to make good a big deficit jibed with a drought or a packers' market he would be wiped out.

Ruined through his sympathy and generosity with a sham hiccougher. The thought stung Robert into action. He called the clerks. They came on the run, missionized Sierra Leonese in duck trousers, soft shirts and tennis shoes. They stood stiffly attentive, yet slyly sizing up the new massa. Robert sensed that; got a grip on himself and with even voice set three clerks to counting a hundred pounds of the silver and instructed them to use the barter store scales to weigh the rest against the counted hundred.

Others he questioned about the stocktaking, for his suspicions were flying all round now. Were the stocks as represented on the balance sheets?

"No, sah. Mistah Bayliss done send ten headloads away by carriers y'stday mo'ning. Headloads of barter goods, sah."

"And the stuff is not charged on the books?"

"No, sah. De carriers done take de El Nadir trail, sah."

El Nadir! Then Bayliss' talk of taking the Sierra Leone trail for the Liverpool boat was a blind. He was gone after—what?—a treaty or the ivory treasure? But that question must wait. Robert had no hesitation as to the course he must take.

He demanded of the clerks whether a horse could be hired or bought in N'doni. Being answered in the affirmative he sent a man to get a mount, but his gaze chancing on Omo he changed the order for two mounts.

The panic was passed now. Robert's head was right on the job, as his thought to take Omo showed. Robert had acquired Omo through his propensity for taking sporting chances. They had told him at the shipping port that the Jekri was the laziest boy on the river.

But Robert discovered that Omo meant Ebb-Tide, at which time the Jekri was born, and that saddled him with a taboo against activity of any sort during ebb tides. Omo, however, had been servant to a massa in the tideless regions of the Upper Niger, and so far from being lazy he had an ambition to become an interpreter.

Thus he had picked up the Fulani tongue, and had been Robert's instructor on the voyage up river. Fulani was spoken in N'doni and El Nadir. In fact Robert had reason to congratulate his willingness to take sporting chances, for in Omo he had not only a devoted servant but a groundwire to what was going on among the natives.

EL NADIR, Robert learned, was one day by horse and three by foot from N'doni. He had Omo fill water skins and make up a package of soup concentrates and hard tack. By this time the clerks were able to report the sum total of the loot in silver and goods. The total was a trifle over two thousand pounds, which in dollars fatefully figured into a little over the sum of dad's bond.

That fact became an obsession with Robert. It brought such a hard look into his face that the clerks saw a terrifying time ahead for them under the new massa. They jumped to carry out his orders with palpitating forwardness. They carried the cases of silver down to the barterstore, which Robert locked. He proclaimed a holiday. Important business took him to El Nadir, he said. He might be back in one day or several. Meantime the gates of the compound were to be kept shut.

He made his arrangements quietly, authoritatively. He had a queer feeling of being a stranger to himself. He was possessed by a kind of jocund savagery. Every sense of decency he owned revolted at Bayliss' treachery. There was a baseness of selfishness in ruining a benefactor that stirred Robert's profoundest being. Every thought and feeling, every nerve and muscle in him seemed to gather into one driving force. He dropped a revolver in a side pocket of his coat with a grin, as if it were a grim jest.

The horses were at the gangway. They were cob-size shaggy mounts with low-hung bellies. Hardly, however, were Robert and Omo in the high-pommeled saddles, their feet in the broad leather stirrups, ere Robert knew he had speed between his legs.

In the town that lay outside the station Robert saw a litter lying against a hut. But he had already suspected that Bayliss had dropped his languor and sham hiccoughings the moment he was out of sight from the station and had discarded the litter for horse. Robert banked his hopes on the carriers. They had left the station yesterday morning, and as El Nadir was three days by foot and one by horse he had a prospect of overtaking Bayliss on the trail.

But it turned out that he was up against a man who knew his Africa. He met Bayliss' carriers idling back to N'doni. Questioned, they said they had been relieved of their headloads by runners. Robert sucked in a hard breath. Short-distance runners, with Bayliss riding ahead and arranging for quick relays!

It was characteristic of the man Robert had to deal with. Nothing wild and precipitous about Bayliss, but shrewd calculations, carefully weighed plans, that took every possible advantage of his knowledge of the country and natives. Realization of this made Robert push the pace all his mount could stand, in a desperate hope to get the show-down with Bayliss before El Nadir and complications.

The one sample Robert had already had of Bayliss' treachery had peculiarly affected Robert's courage. Had he analyzed his dread of trickery he would have found that it lay in a knowledge that trickery might be fought with trickery, and only a trickster at heart can cope with a trickster.

But if he overtook Bayliss on the trail it would be a simple matter of rough tactics and recovery of the loot. Robert counted it in his favor that Bayliss would expect him to be acting on his advice to leave the silver alone, till he had the hang of things. Thus

Bayliss would not be expecting so speedy a pursuit.

But Robert reckoned without two important items in Africa. First there was the heat, which danced on the plains as if off a hot stove. The horses had to be rested and shaded through the worst of the day, and though good time was made under a three-quarters moon that night, next midday found them camped in a village twenty odd miles from El Nadir.

There Omo astonished Robert with the information that Bayliss was at that moment entering El Nadir. The Jekri had often astounded Robert by his seemingly uncanny knowledge of things. But in this case the explanation was simple. Omo had heard drums talking.

"Great Scott!" gasped Robert, struck by the probability that Bayliss was informed by the drums of a white man coming behind him.

However that might be, the show-down must come in El Nadir now. The mercury of Robert's confidence fell several degrees. His affair with Bayliss bade fair to be complicated by intrigue. It was almost a cinch that the new young emir would develop an avaricious interest in the loot. The more Robert conned it over the less he liked it. When he was in the saddle again on the last lap to El Nadir, he gave deep thought to Bayliss' objective. He had to know what he was likely to be going up against.

The only theory he could adduce was that Bayliss was trying to put over with Kolo the deal he had been unable to pull off with the fanatical Emir Abwol. No doubt Bayliss counted on Kolo's sojourn on the Gold Coast having tamed the barbarian in him. Perhaps the young emir had returned in a derby and trousers and aping white man's manners.

Was Bayliss after a treaty or the ivory or both? Was he making an eleventh-hour dash on behalf of the company, with an idea of boosting his bonus? That would give a cloak to his secrecy, for treaty making was now the prerogative of Robert, the new agent. But if working for the company Bayliss could have charged the loot as the "consideration," as the lawyers say, in the treaty agreement.

On the other hand a hide-bound clause in his agreement with the company barred him from occupation of personal profit within the Sokoto sphere. A treaty so obtained became automatically the property of the company. Then Bayliss must be intriguing for the ivory, which he could take down into French Sudan.

Intrigue! El Nadir appeared through the shimmering hues of sundown with dun-colored walls and turreted gateways, mosque domes and minarets like a veritable medieval city of intrigue.

Riding down fields of millet and yams, Robert passed under an arch in the walls, then left it to Omo's knowledge of the lay of African towns to discover the house of the emir. He calculated that Bayliss could hardly have accomplished his business in his few hours in El Nadir.

The chances were the looter was by this time insinuating a dicker into the ear of a dolled-up prince in a tan derby, striped shirt and check trousers, lolling in a hammock chair with a bag of golf sticks conspicuously in evidence and jabbering pidgin-English and affecting the airs of a white gentleman.

It never struck Robert that he might be making a big mistake about Kolo or that a bit of wariness about intruding himself into the palaver would not be amiss.

In fact as he rode around a large open market place his thoughts swung to a discovery that El Nadir was a large manufacturing and trade center. Though the stalls of the marketplace were for some reason deserted, there was tremendous activity in open-fronted shops built all around the market. Sandal makers, indigo dyers, weavers, spinners, leather workers, pottery makers and smiths were as busy as if they were expecting an army of clamorous buyers about to descend on the town.

And a real town it was, with narrow, house-packed streets radiating from the marketplace. What a market for the company's goods, Robert thought excitedly. Right there he knew he was going to talk treaty talk with Kolo—after the settlement with Bayliss.

OMO stopped before a jumble of courtyards that suggested a palace beyond. Leaving the horses with the Jekri, Robert plunged into the outer courtyard. His vision was filled with a porky face with a drooping mustache and sly blue eyes. He was passionately desirous of coming face to face with the looter.

But the hope got a set-back on sight of

ten headloads under a turbaned and burnoosed guard in the courtyard. He had a scare that Bayliss, warned by the drums that nemesis was hot on his trail, had hurried his dicker with Kolo, paid over to the emir the loot, and got away with what he had come for.

The fear sent Robert charging through the inner yards, where tall, lean, swarthy Fulani in billowy burnooses and turbans, a fold of the latter wound across their faces, so that all one saw was the bridge of a black nose, a pair of black eyes and black hands, regarded him haughtily, but made no attempt to detain him. Robert grinned knowingly. Undoubtedly the drums had reported a white man riding toward El Nadir. In a word, he was expected.

He flung across the courtyard into another and headed into a low entrance to a castle-like pile.

A sharp change from sundown glare to the gloom of a spacious room left Robert temporarily sightless. He had an impression of voices having suddenly quieted. There were others in the room. He heard breathing, felt eyes watching him. The sightless moments were eternities of discomfort.

For all Robert knew he may have committed a fatal breach of custom in thus blundering into the presence of the Emir. He had an atrocious feeling of thoughts, emotions, passions suspended, waiting.

Then in a thin light diffused by high-placed slits in the walls a pipe-clayed helmet shaped out about three feet above the clay floor. Under it was the tubby figure of Bayliss, the body sloping forward, the legs tucked in under, on a grass mat.

Of a sudden Robert's brain snapped to focus on an African seated cross-legged on a dyed sheepskin a few feet from Bayliss. Dyed sheepskins being the emblematic throne of emirs, Robert knew he was in the presence of Kolo. His preconceptions of the young emir as a dolled-up, aping negro were dumfounded by swarthy aquiline features under a white turban and a supple body, simply clothed in a white burnoose. Not a single ornament to show the barbarian, for a string of prayer beads wound round a sinuous left wrist could not be called an ornament. It signified an emir faithful to the Mohammedanism of his forebears.

The moments were filled with inscrutable things. Impressions swept Robert with kaleidoscopic rapidity. The emir had given not the least sign of awareness of the intruder. His face was carven hauteur, his black, intense eyes stony. Robert had a feeling as of having blundered into something explosive.

He wondered how the talk which he had interrupted had been going. Bayliss had the gloomy look of a man whose affairs were in a bad way. That phase of the situation tickled Robert's sense of humor. To count on an easy bit of business with a soft black in a tan derby and check trousers, only to buck up against a stern personality, would have nonplused a much stronger man than the paunchy trickster.

Robert made a move to break the deadlock. He invited himself to a seat on the floor. A son of Montana was not going to stand whilst addressing an African seated. The emir's dark pupils flashed angry notation of the move and its meaning. That gave Robert the cue to a hot race-pride in Kolo. But in a moment the black eyes had regained their stony hauteur.

Bayliss mustered the impudence to make a brief introduction—

"Mr. Robert Chatteris, Agent at N'doni, Emir."

Robert glanced derisive thanks to the introducer.

A strange thing then happened. Bayliss caught Robert's eyes with a significant look and slowly dropped a glance down to the side pocket of Robert's pongee coat. Robert understood that Bayliss was letting him know that he saw the telltale bulge and sagging there of the revolver. Robert was perfectly aware that the gun was in evidence. He intended it to be so. He expected Bayliss to be impressed by it. To his mystification the little blue eyes lifted from the pockets with leering triumph. But that could not be gone into now.

Robert squared to Kolo, debating with himself whether to make the customary ornate address, as, "O, Kolo, Great Emir of El Nadir, Lord of the Fulani, and so forth," but in the end he merely said that as he and Kolo were neighbors they ought to get acquainted.

With no change in his frozen hauteur, Kolo bayed a laconic proverb—

"As to the future, even a bird with a long neck can not see it, but Allah only."

Bing! Robert was in the ring. His opponent had landed a jab, by way of sample of what was coming. Robert rose to it joyously. But before he could make a reply the emir suddenly began reciting the Lay of the Ivory Treasure of El Nadir.

Robert stared dumfounded. He could see no connection. Yet Kolo had not the look of one given to idle whims. Far otherwise. He chanted with a dry, mocking, pointed tonelessness. Robert squirmed under it. He looked to Bayliss for clues in his expression.

Bayliss' face wore the sickly grin of a victim of a practical joke. Again Robert wondered what had been the nature of the talk which his arrival had interrupted. Had Bayliss been sounding the emir on a dicker for the ivory treasure? That might furnish a motive for Kolo's recital. The emir's basso filled all the room in mincing recitation of the inspired lay:

Mighty is the Emir of El Nadir;
He overcometh all enemies.
The Shehu of Kuda Bara,
When the battle was done,
Paid homage to El Nadir;
Sent two hundred tusks to El Nadir.
And thus Kuda Bara owned fealty.

Kolo was proceeding with the next verse, when Robert savagely decided he had had enough. It struck him that Kolo was perhaps under the misapprehension that he also was come to El Nadir after the ivory and was laughing up the wide sleeves of his burnoose, deriding the greed of whites, perhaps. He broke in on the emir's chant.

"I've heard it all before, Emir. I know it by heart, down to the last line, 'And the Ivory Treasure of El Nadir is five thousand tusks.' Maybe it is. I'm not interested," Robert caustically remarked.

He rose as he was speaking. He had decided that his business with Bayliss could not be broached before the emir. The bare suspicion that the emir might know the headloads were loot and that one of his white guests was a thief, the other his pursuer was repulsive to Robert's race pride. Yet it was not unlikely.

Robert had divined a scornful hostility in the emir from the first moment he had met the stony look of his black eyes. He felt that if he did not get away quickly his feelings might get the best of him.

There was something explosive in the air. He determined to censure the emir's impudence by a curt leavetaking. But Kolo got in a dismissal before Robert could speak. He clapped his palms. A man with a sun device embroidered on the breast of his burnoose entered smartly. Kolo bade him conduct the white man to lodgment in the House of the Strangers.

ROBERT caught a vindictive smirk in the emir's eyes as he gave the order. Turning to Bayliss to say he would be glad to see him at the House of the Strangers when it was convenient, he surprized on the porky face the double of Kolo's vindictive smirk. Evidently there was something unpleasant in the lodgment. Bayliss' smirk, however, faded away into a questioning and dubious reception of Robert's invitation. As far as the tone said anything it might have been a request or a threat. It left Bayliss guessing if his crime was discovered.

Robert followed the guide out to a reunion with Omo, who fairly trembled with joy at his massa's safe deliverance. Evidently Omo had had unpleasant experiences with Mohammedan princes. Leading back along the marketplace, the guide conducted them to a large courtyard surrounded by open-fronted rooms that were little more than square holes in a wall ten feet thick.

The center of the yard was occupied by a shelter with rack of green fodder for horses. Robert took a room that faced the entrance and gave him a view of the marketplace.

He expected Bayliss to show up, if only to nose out what he, Robert, was there for. The expectation was realized almost ere Robert had philosophically accommodated himself to a hard clay floor for a seat.

Bayliss swung into the yard with a mixture of bounce and uncertainty, his face tortured into a tentative grin that was ready to break out into a deceitful smile of relief if Robert proved innocent of knowledge of the looting. Robert noted, and hid murder in his heart. He had to play a cautious hand. The stake—his father's bond, the N'doni agency, the trust and high opinion of three high officials of the company and his own honor—was too great for rash action.

"It's a mutual surprize—our meeting in El Nadir," Bayliss remarked, feeling out the situation.

"Rather," Robert rejoined dryly. "You were a very sick man headed in a litter for Sierra Leone, if you remember."

"Oh, it's come and go with malaria when

you're acclimated to it," Bayliss responded with visible relief, for surely Chatteris would have jumped him hard had he known of the loot. "Fact is I saw a big chance here."

"So you're making a try for the treaty?" fished Robert, wondering the while if Bayliss had the balance sheets on him.

He decided that the fellow would not take any chance like that.

"D'ye blame me for trying to give my bonus a boost?" Bayliss returned as patly as if he had taken his cue from Robert's words. It was as good as if he had said he was not after the treaty. "You—same idea?" he asked with an overdone air of casualness.

Robert let him think so.

"Kolo won't have any truck with whites," Bayliss continued advisorily. "There's lots of his father the Hyena in young Kolo."

"Then aren't you wasting your time?" countered Robert.

"Your case and mine ain't the same, not by a long shot," Bayliss affirmed. "*I* am Kolo's official guest; you are lodged in the House of the Strangers. You got in bad with Kolo when you sat down before addressing him. Didn't you see the —— dance in his eyes?"

"So," purred Robert. "It didn't seem to me that you and Kolo were so lovey dovey."

Bayliss slanted an oblique scrutiny down at Robert and shifted the talk.

"If we're both after the treaty we ought to be doing teamwork."

Throttling a desire to knock the man down, Robert said he paddled his own canoe.

"You started in well," scoffed Bayliss. "Walking into the emir's house with that gun in your pocket as plain as a cannon. You went to a friendly palaver armed, or closed fists, as the blacks say."

"M'mm—I slipped up on etiquette," Robert commented with a deceptive pleasant voice. "Thanks for the hint." A gentle sarcasm crept into his tone. "I'll remember it in your favor when we have our accounting."

"Our accounting?" Bayliss echoed nervously.

Robert still kept his outward pleasantness.

"Just a trifling matter of two thousand pounds shy in the silver and stocks."

Robert rose from the floor with the words.

After all Bayliss must have had a suspicion of Robert's objective, so ready was he with alibi.

"Those thieving clerks! I ought to have warned you, seeing you were just in from a long trip on the river and due for a heavy sleep. Yep," Bayliss chirped brightly, "those Sierra Leonese got busy whilst you slept."

Robert sucked in air through shut teeth. He was alarmed by the rascal's effrontery. It suggested that Bayliss felt himself to be secure. He was relying on some phase of the situation there in El Nadir unfavorable to Robert and favorable to himself. He was bold in cunning.

"You yellow cur!" exploded Robert.

Omo, sitting off in a corner, sprang to his massa's side, as the way of a dog that senses trouble in its master's voice.

"You worked on my sympathy with your fake sickness to trick me to sign cooked balance sheets!"

Bayliss fell back a step before the blast. His puffy face was clownish in its consternation.

"No violence, no violence—" his tongue clacked automatically—"violence won't get you anywhere," he murmured, and seemed to take encouragement from his own words, as if they had propounded an actual factor in the situation.

Robert noted with a savage premonition that his quest was already tangled in an obscure situation. No, violence would not avail. The loot was under guard at the house of the emir, and it was a cinch that Bayliss had not come there with the balance sheets on his person. He controlled his rage.

"Well, you have found out what you came here to learn. You know what I am after."

Bayliss was fast recovering his equipoise. He affected astonishment.

"Came to learn? I came to slip it to you that Kolo has it in for you. If you knew, you'd go whilst the going's good. It ain't for nothing you're lodged in the House of the Strangers," Bayliss asserted.

Robert glanced around the place, which was little better than a stable yard.

"Kolo certainly doesn't overdo hospitality," he reflected.

"You may have your eyes opened to nasty points in Fulani hospitality before you're through," Bayliss croaked with a bitterness that suggested a personal grudge against Kolo's ideas of hospitality, for all that he was lodged in the emir's house.

He morosely repeated that if Robert had any horse sense he would go whilst the going was good. He had been backing off as he spoke, as if to make a bolt if Robert made a move to detain him. He turned on the last word and went off in a quick slouch.

Robert watched the departing shapeless back thoughtfully. The chump had tried to scare him out of El Nadir. Then his, Robert's, presence complicated matters in some way for Bayliss. The fellow was in a jam of some sort with Kolo.

Thus occupied with his thoughts, Robert hardly noticed a young woman who swung with a buoyant rhythm into the yard till she was standing before him in the open front of his room, her large deer eyes holding his astonished gaze with a strange softening, friendly look that made him wary of he know not what.

A cloth wound under her armpits extended to molded calves. Her skin a silky tan, face placid but intelligent, her right hand—the wrist encircled with broad ivory bracelets—resting on a full hip, while her left curved gracefully upward to an earthen pot on a poised head. She would have been awarded a prize in any beauty contest. Robert allowed it, as he would have allowed beauty in the lines of a colt.

But he was mistrustful of the steady look in the limpid eyes, regarding him from antimony-painted lids with something more than friendliness—something too free, too inviting.

The girl set her pot down at his feet, saying the emir sent him supper. Omo jumped to the pot and tasted of yam and chicken stewed in palm oil before Robert took a chance on poisoned food. Robert smiled at the devotion, without sharing the suspicion. Kolo had not the look of a secret prisoner.

Robert was more occupied with a presentiment about the girl. She stepped uninvited into the room and sat down on the floor. Robert's presentiment passed into a raging certainty. He aired the Fulani which he had learned from Omo.

"Tell thy emir I am thankful for the supper. Get up and go."

The girl replied simply—

"The white man hath no woman."

Robert took the girl by her arms, raised her off the floor and walked her to the yard. His manner was gentle, but he boiled within.

"Go! Say to Emir Kolo, 'White is white; black is black. Nor need he put a spy on me. My ways are open. Go!' "

He pushed her, against her sullen resistance, from the yard.

* * *

THE incident gave Robert something to worry about. First the humble lodgment, which in itself was almost an insult, and then this proffer of a black mate. The emir wished to humiliate him. But why? What was the policy, what was the passion behind these deliberate insults? The sending of the girl to him looked like a calculated smack at race pride; an attempt to take down a white a peg or two.

Then Bayliss had spoken the truth about Kolo having it in for him, Robert. And if the scene at the emir's house said anything it said that the young buck had it in for Bayliss, too. Robert recalled the emir's mocking recital of the Lay of the Ivory Treasure of El Nadir. In fact the mincing, toneless basso had been a mocking echo in Robert's head all along. He was still squirming inwardly under a resentful feeling that Kolo was having a vicious game with a pair of whites whom Fate had brought to his town. Where lay the joke, unless the tale was a myth?

Robert suddenly remembered the vague way in which the agent general had mentioned the ivory treasure and his own suspicion at the time that McNair was seeding the ground for a practical joke. It would take quite a large place to store five thousand tusks, thought Robert, and prompt on the thought he dispatched Omo to locate the treasure house. If such a place existed, Omo's uncanny genius in such errands could be depended on to discover it.

Whilst waiting Omo's return Robert had an adventure that revealed the unpopularity of whites in El Nadir and forecasted complications in the recovery of either the loot or the signed balance sheets. The deserted marketplace underwent a swift and miraculous change.

El Nadir seemed to wake up after sundown to life and business. Venders with goods appeared behind the market stalls; caravans streamed into the town; camels, dromedaries, donkeys, laden with dates, kolo nuts, grain, oil; Housa merchants, Shua herders driving cattle and sheep; swift-mounted Tawarek—the Veiled Men of the Desert, so called from their habit of winding a fold of their turbans across their faces, to filter their breathing of the *harmattan* blown sands, gave the market the character of a medieval fair.

Excited by the revelation of El Nadir as a great trade center and its importance to the N'doni agency, Robert flung out of the yard, for a close-up view of the barter prospects. In the twinkling of an eye he was surrounded by a mob of women, who showed an indelicate curiosity into the "magic" of the buttons of his clothes. He shooed them off with a grimace. They ran shrieking that he gave them the evil eye. Their superstitious cry attracted a crowd of men.

Robert found himself ringed around with villainous faces and the target for filthily personal epithets. A precipitous retreat would have been fatal. Erect and unflinching, he reminded the ruffians that he was the guest of their emir. Derisive guffaws greeted the statement.

"Oh, our emir lodges the guest in the House of the Strangers," a voice taunted.

Another emitted an ominous proverb—"The goat was curious to count the teeth of the lion."

A savage growl rumbled from another throat:

"The dog of a swine-eating Christian spies on our town. Aye, he spies! Go back to thy honorable lodgment in the House of the Strangers, white man."

Robert was thankful to escape with a whole skin and for the lesson that his white face and clothes would constitute a severe handicap to his free movements.

Thought of disguise and the means presented themselves simultaneously; a little charcoal on the bridge of his nose and around his eyes and on his hands, then a turban, a fold across his face, a long burnoose and high sheepskin moccasins, and no one would know him for a white man. He made the decision on his way back to his humble quarters.

But what had he to trade for the required articles? Only the gun. An African will sell his soul to get a gun. Robert decided to part with it. It was not likely he would use it against Bayliss, still less was it of any use against a mob of blacks, all of whom carried knives up their sleeves.

Hardly had he made the decision when Omo flung in with uncouth primitive impetuosity and gabbered a lot of information that had nothing to do with his search for the treasure house. The Jekri turned a natural inquisitiveness and love of gossip to the service of his massa. His chatter discovered to Robert that luck had brought him to El Nadir during the great market that was held every month over five nights of the full moon, the trading beginning at sundown and lasting till midnight. At last Omo came round to the treasure house. He had located it in the town wall on the other side of El Nadir.

Robert questioned him minutely and doubtfully, for the existence of the treasure was contrary to his understanding of Kolo's mocking recitation. But Omo described the place, which, furthermore, he said had been pointed out to him as the treasure house. It was no secret in El Nadir. The people were proud of their possession of five thousand tusks.

"Dey make big-belly—proud—talk of dat ivory," Omo said.

Still Robert could not free his suspicions of Kolo's mockery and of McNair's veiled hints. He determined to see the place with his own eyes. The decision brought the matter of disguise to immediate issue.

After thinking a bit, Robert dispatched the reliable Omo to pick up acquaintance with a Tawarek and sound him on a trade of a gun for his clothes. He put his hopes on a Tawarek because they were desert cutthroats, come into El Nadir as the hired guards of caravans, though their real profession was robbery. A brigand would think nothing of shedding his clothes and exchanging for a gun, then going out of town and sticking up the first wayfarer he met and reappareling himself.

In the interim of Omo's new errand Robert was furnished an eye opener into the insult of his lodgment. The yard began to fill up with riffraff, dirty Shua herders and their wives, slaves, donkeys, impudent negresses, professional beggars, who crowded the place in a shamelessly brazen domesticity.

In short order the yard was a muddle of cooking pots, charcoal braziers, dung heaps, refuse, rags and scavenging buzzards. A babel of dialects, air as foul as a sewer and a gaping crowd before his room filled to the brim the measure of Kolo's insult.

Robert experienced the sickening of one who feels himself the object of a malignant hate that he can not trace to any cause. He and Kolo had met as strangers. Yet the emir had shown hostility immediately. Had Bayliss poisoned Kolo's mind against him? But, no, Bayliss himself was in some sort of a jam with Kolo's hatred. The only deduction Robert could make was that the emir was actuated by a savage race hatred against whites.

The sickening feeling passed away into a half-scornful, half-vicious determination to wrest from Kolo a treaty. Opposition was to Robert a stimulant. Every bit of feeling, every nerve and muscle gathered into one driving force. The treaty even pushed the matter with Bayliss into second place. Robert could even be thankful for Bayliss' treachery, in that it had brought him to El Nadir and given him an eye opener to its trade and its importance to the company.

HIS thoughts were broken by a Tawarek curse in the yard. The crowd before his room split apart, exposing Omo with a tall, lean, swaggering ruffian. Robert broke the gun in his pocket and emptied out its shell. Necessity made him a felonious dealer in firearms to a native, but he would at least render the gun harmless, and trust to the Tawarek's covetousness to overlook such a trifle as lack of amunition.

Covetousness! The dicker was accomplished with astonishing celerity in one minute and two gestures. Robert displayed the gun. The eyes of the Tawarek snapped out of his head. Without ado he stepped from the moonlight into the shadow of the room and with rapid movements shed his turban, burnoose and knee-high sheepskin moccasins, snatched the gun before the white had time to repent of the bargain, stuck it in a loincloth and swaggered off.

Robert bade Omo get a stick of charcoal from a brazier in the yard. But as he was about to make the disguise a man swung into the yard and headed directly for Robert. On his burnoose was embroidered a sun, which Robert had noted on the burnooses of the attendants of the emir. He spoke hurriedly in the Fulani tongue.

"O, white man, Emir Kolo bids thee mount and ride for the gate to the Sierra Leone trail. Wait thou there in the arch for the coming of him whom thou pursueth."

The message—a bolt out of the blue—electrified Robert to action. It might be a hoax, a trap, but the bare thought of Bayliss slipping away discounted all else. To reach his mount tethered under the shelter in the middle of the yard, fling on the saddle, mount and ride forth was the work of little more than a minute. When Robert moved he moved, and that was all there was to it. Riding around the marketplace to avoid the throngs, he reached the arch by which he had entered El Nadir a few hours before.

With jaws set, eyes burning hard, thoughts tumbling one on top of the other, Robert waited. Had he traded off the gun five minutes too soon? Why was Kolo warning him of Bayliss' flight? "He whom thought pursueth." Then Kolo knew of the situation between him, Robert, and the looter. But why was the emir letting him know of Bayliss' plan to escape? What was the motive, the policy. Why was the black man's race pride coming between him and Bayliss? A trick? Another humiliation?

Had Bayliss put over his deal? Was he coming with five thousand tusks? Where would he get the carriers? No, he could not be coming with the ivory and taking the Sierra Leone trail, for that took him through British territory; he would have to convince cantonment officers en route that the ivory was not poached from the company's sphere of influence, and would have to show an ivory trader's license, and that he had paid the government royalty of two shillings a pound.

If Bayliss had the ivory he would be taking the gate across the town for the trail down into French Sudan, where no questions would be asked as to his right to the ivory.

Then had Bayliss negotiated the treaty? Or had he given up hope of breaking the jam he was in with Kolo and determined to get away with the balance sheets and the headloads?

Of a sudden Robert's cogitations snapped off on sight of a party of mounted Fulani riding toward the gate with showy horsemanship. They wheeled, pranced, cavorted as if they were a circus. Robert got a homesick vision of a bunch of Montana cowboys on a spree.

A break in their ranks exposed Bayliss, mounted. But there were neither ivory carriers nor the headloads in his wake. Had Kolo helped himself to the loot and told Bayliss to get out? But the horsemen were obviously an escort. Bayliss was being escorted as an honored departing guest.

Robert's exultant deduction was that he

had been fooled in thinking Bayliss' objective had been the ivory. The fellow had been after a treaty. The parchment document, no doubt, rustled in his breast pocket against the signed balance sheets.

Had his dearest wish been granted it would have been to meet the paunchy trickster in the saddle with the stuff on his person. He did not look for interference from the escort, for Kolo would not have sent the message and at the same time have given Bayliss an escort for protection.

Robert was ready for action, for swift, direct, brutal work.

But as Bayliss neared, his face showed lines of sullen resentment that did not jibe with Robert's idea of him as a successful treaty maker. He reminded Robert of a tenderfoot in Montana sulking under the horseplay of cowboys. There was something here that Robert could not understand.

The escort were yelling derisively as they pranced and wheeled. The leaders passed where Robert waited in the shadow of the arch without the least surprize at seeing him waiting there. It struck Robert that they expected him to be there; that the whole situation had been contrived by Kolo with some sinister purpose.

But Bayliss had caught sight of his nemesis. He brought his mount to a sudden startled halt. He sagged in his saddle in pitiful surprize. Robert urged his horse forward. He was in fettle for raw work. He was sick of the whole business. He saw the Fulani draw off, like spectators.

The black —— had come there to witness a fight between the whites. That was Kolo's play—another humiliation.

Robert's anger rose against the sly, cowardly trickster whose conduct had brought about this meeting that bade fair to lower white man's prestige in the eyes of Africans. He determined to get it over and done with quickly. He rode alongside Bayliss, his tall, supple figure, hard as steel from Oxford athletics, contrasting with Bayliss' pudgy shapelessness.

"Bayliss!" he barked. "You know what I want. Hand over those balance sheets. And whilst your about it hand over the treaty."

"Treaty?" gasped Bayliss with unaffected surprize.

"Then it *was* the ivory you were after?" barked Robert. "How is it you are leaving without it, and without the headloads?"

Bayliss had no answer. Perhaps that was too long a story for the telling there or it may have been his mind was on escape. He cast a calculating look toward the arch. Robert noted.

"No good, Bayliss," grimly. "I'm going to get those balance sheets."

But even a coyote will fight in a pinch. Without those signed sheets Bayliss risked arrest by wireless on landing in England to face a charge of embezzlement. He suddenly dug his heels into his mount. The horse leaped for the arch. As suddenly Robert's arm swung out and coiled around Bayliss' thick waist like a steel rope.

Bayliss frantically clutched the pommel of his saddle. That would not have saved him if Robert's horse hadn't taken fright and plunged. Bayliss' weight and his clutch on the pommel acted like an anchor drag on Robert. The saddles were native made with grass ropes for girths. Robert's girth broke. Still keeping his hold on Bayliss, he was pulled from his horse, his feet dragging the ground in a tangle of saddle and stirrups.

Bayliss saw his chance. He swung back his right arm and plunged his fist in a downward swinging blow at Robert's face. Robert dodged the blow with a raucous laugh. Unbraced against failure of his fist to land, Bayliss dropped from his saddle as if pulled down. He dropped on Robert—a flabby, inert lump of funk.

ROBERT drove a hand at Bayliss' breast pocket. The latter suddenly locked his arms across his chest, made a pivoting swing that freed him of Robert and dropped on his face on the earth. Next moment Robert was on top of him and trying to roll him face-up and get at the pocket. Bayliss tightened his folded arms desperately and kicked.

Into Robert's ears crashed buzzing guffaws from the Fulani. Stung by a thought that every detail would be reported to the mocking Kolo, he got up, caught Bayliss by his collar, yanked him to his feet and tried to wrest apart his folded arms. Down plumped Bayliss again to earth, rolled over on his chest and kicked for all he was worth.

The Fulani yelled with delight. They jeered, spat, chortled. The uproar was attracting people from the town. With sudden revulsion to the exhibition they presented of two whites fighting in the dirt, Robert handed Bayliss a respite.

"Get up! I won't touch you. Go back to the emir. Don't try another sneak from El Nadir, for I'm informed of your movements. Go back to the emir's house. I'll see you there in the morning, and, take it from me, we'll settle this business then."

He waited to see Bayliss in the saddle, riding funereally toward the emir's house, then he threw his own saddle over his shoulder, took his horse, which the Fulani had secured and walked back to the House of the Strangers.

Robert was too mad over the incident all round to do any clear thinking. He wanted action of any sort, wanted intensely to be doing something. But the only action in view was the visit he had been about to make to the treasure house when Kolo's messenger had arrived.

He donned the burnoose and moccasins, charcoaled his nose and around his eyes, wrapped the turban around his head, brought a fold across the lower half of his face and set forth with Omo for guide. He went by way of the emir's house, to see if the headloads were still in the outer yard there. He could not puzzle out why Bayliss had been leaving the loot behind. It was inconceivable that he had done so voluntarily, and yet he was going away without anything to show for it.

A glance into the outer courtyard showed the ten headloads there, still under guard. But if they had passed into the hands of the emir they would have been taken into the palace. On the other hand it was likely that in a land where thieving was a legitimate profession a custom had grown up that entailed upon a host the protection of the property of a guest. Or was it all a bluff, another sample of Kolo's biting humor? But only Bayliss could answer that.

Robert pushed on to the treasure house, following Omo down a narrow gut of adobe houses that knew neither window panes or doors, to the town wall, where the Jekri indicated a guard leaning half-asleep on his spear before a reed curtain over a cellar-room in the wall.

One glance told Robert all he wanted to know about the fabulous ivory treasure of El Nadir. Fabulous! Five thousand tusks in a room which thirty would have crowded! And a guard half-asleep, and a flimsy reed curtain for door, in a land, too, of thieves. Plainly the motive behind the deception no longer existed, hence the illusion was so carelessly guarded that an intelligent appraisal of the treasure house exploded it.

"Omo," said Robert as they turned away, "these emirs of El Nadir have been a bunch of bluffers."

"Sah, I no savvy dat word bluffers."

"Never mind. Tell me, why do the troubadours sing of an ivory treasure when there is none?"

"'Coz dey done please de emir an' he gib dem big dash."

"How please him?"

"Make him feel heap big-belly, an' make him enemies 'fraid."

After a step or two Robert interpreted that to mean that the supposed possession of five thousand tusks gave the emir a spurious reputation as a millionaire and inasmuch as ivory was currency the treasure was a mythical war-chest.

A prince would think twice before picking a quarrel with an emir who could bribe powerful chiefs to his standard. Such was the tradition which young Kolo had inherited, and plainly he was keeping up appearances by maintaining a guard before the supposed treasure. A tremendous bluff.

Yes, but there was no bluffing about the vindictiveness behind the persistent, deliberate humiliations. Robert's brain moiled and moiled over the insults and the obscure passion behind them when he reached his lodgings and flung his tired body down on the floor.

First the insult in the House of the Strangers, then the sending of a native woman to keep him company and lastly the bringing about of his muss-up with Bayliss before the derisive Fulani. It all showed a calculated, vicious, persistent purpose to humiliate the two whites whom fate had put in the emir's power.

Robert had an atrocious mental vision of the emir fiendishly planning the trouble at the arch and a second vision of vindictive glee on the swarthy face as the men of the escort told of that rolling in the dirt. He had a disagreeable sensation of being the plaything of an autocrat obsessed by some mad passion.

Robert tried to will his brain to sleep. But it whirled off the mystery of Kolo's hostility to that of Bayliss and the headloads. Presumably Bayliss had got on to the fact that there was no ivory treasure. That was the meaning of his discomfiture under Kolo's mincing recitation of the troubadours' tale. That had come out in the talk between the looter and the emir which Robert's arrival had interrupted.

But why then was Bayliss getting away and leaving the headloads behind? On the face of the position of the headloads under guard in the outer yard of the palace they were still theoretically the property of Bayliss. Then, too, on the surface, he had been escorted as a honored departing guest.

It was a hopeless tangle. The only clear thing was the figure of Kolo as a diabolical, vindictive practical joker. A joker with a nasty sting. All the rest— Well, tomorrow would tell the tale. But what sort of tale? Robert had a feeling as of sitting down on a keg of TNT.

But this mental activity would never do. He had to sleep, to rise in the morning, fit for a day that promised to be a strenuous one. He rose and flung off his disguise, then sent Omo to bring water. He washed off the charcoal with longing thoughts of the cold spray of the gymnasium of athletic days, forced his tired muscles to go through setting-up exercises, by way of disciplining himself and gaining a willed control, then lay down on the floor again and inhaled and exhaled deep and slow, and thus, making his mind a blank, he willed himself to sleep.

II

"MASSA, you fit to done wake up an' eat yo' chop?"

Robert's eyes opened on Omo's homely visage above him. His first notation as he sat up was that the length of the courtyard shadows showed early dawn. Then his whole being leaped to the business in hand, the showdown with Bayliss on the balance sheets. He could not be at his best with Kolo—and he had to be one hundred per cent. good if he hoped to grab off a treaty—with the worry of the deficit and his father's bond on his mind.

Hurriedly gulping down some dates which Omo had got somewhere, but how, Robert thought it as well not to inquire, he left the Jekri in charge of his native disguise and set off for the palace. Thanks to the fact that the Mohammedans were on the housetops at sunrise prayers Robert reached the palace without any adventure with fanaticism.

He ran into Bayliss right off, in the outer courtyard moodily regarding his guarded packs. Through the opening to the inner court Robert glimpsed Kolo on a dyed sheepskin before a crescent of seated Africans. He recognized the negroland institution of sunrise court.

He brought his gaze back sharply to Bayliss. He could hold no anger against the middle-aged stodgy fool who gambled his standing with the company and everything on a fable that was evidently the joke of the N'doni agency. For it was now plain to Robert that the agent general had been having his little game, too, in mentioning the ivory treasure at the dinner aboard the stern wheeler.

No doubt other agents had accepted the fable and become the joke of the chop-rooms of the Niger trading stations. Bayliss ought to have kept off adventure and taken a steady job. A tragic middle-aged failure he looked as he dolefully regarded the headloads, which apparently he had been unable to take with him.

Robert could not be angry against such a man. Perhaps he had a wife and children. He looked like a family man. And here he was, an embezzler, his disaster so complete that he was indifferent to the presence of the man he had tricked. His attitude said, "Well, here I am. Here's the loot. What are you going to do about it?" Still, Robert was vitally concerned in the matter.

"I take it, Bayliss, you were pulling out last night with my signature and wiping off your venture to nothing lost, nothing gained. You know of course the treasure tale is flimflam?"

Bayliss hitched a shoulder, as if that was that. He looked towards the inner court, mumbling.

"You're expected. If you hadn't shown up Kolo would have had you fetched."

"Fetched?" snapped Robert.

"Kolo's orders were for us both to go right in when you came. I told him you said you were dropping around here in the morning."

"Orders! The cheeky beggar."

"The —— has something nasty up his sleeve," Bayliss rejoined in a cautionary tone. "Well, we might as well go in."

Robert nodded.

"All right. You and I can have our talk

later. Something up his sleeve, eh? Well, the sooner he shakes it down the better I'll be pleased. I'm about fed up on his nastiness."

Bayliss took fright on Robert's airy manner. "There's no sense in r'iling him," he warned.

"Ever own a bull terrier, Bayliss?"

"No. What's that got to do with Kolo?"

"If a bull terrier shows his teeth go right at him and he'll calm down. Back away and he'll be at your throat in a leap."

"He's the high whack here," Bayliss reminded timidly. "We're a long, long way from a policeman. And we're ordered to attend his court. Summoned, if you like."

"Gee! Is that the way of it. Let's go."

Robert strode into the inner court with Bayliss hangdog at his heels.

Kolo imperiously beckoned them within the crescent, into the prisoners' dock, it might have been. Robert complied with an exaggerated slouch, and would have given anything for a cigaret or some way to express his perfect self-possession. He didn't like the look in the tiger eyes. Ugly humors lurked in their black depths.

Kolo started right in on Bayliss with sarcasm.

"You are funnaie mans, Mistah Bayliss. Yest'dy you say good-by. I send you honorable escort. Den at de gate you change yo' min'. Ver' funnaie."

Bayliss squirmed and glared. It struck Robert that perhaps his nerves were on a raw edge, what with last night's fiasco and all, and if pushed too far he might forget himself and let go at his tormentor.

"You mak' long stay," Kolo continued in his mocking vein. "You put me to expense to guard your—what is de word?—property. You laike out honorable hospitality in escorting de leaving guest?" he asked, with some subtle underplay that Robert could not divine. "It is de Fulani custom to ride before de leaving guest, for does not a man stab from behind."

Robert sensed fiendish irony in the emir's play on the honorable escort. As for Bayliss, he suddenly broke under the teasing, yelling—

"You ——!"

The tiger eyes flashed wickedly.

"Does not polite words. Does ver' dangerous words, "Kolo bassoed ominously. "Not polite, when I haf been so—" Kolo paused, as if to give biting sarcasm to the next word—"hospitable."

Bayliss seemed to shrink as from a torture instrument. He fell to trembling. His teeth chattered as if he were struggling to withhold things better left unsaid. But the words would out.

"You —— nigger!"

Bayliss shrieked it hysterically, and, somehow, Robert liked him the better for it. But he might as well have kicked a stick of giant powder with hobnailed boots. A Fulan—a Mohammedan and an emir—had been called a nigger.

Kolo started up, Robert expected no less than an immediate order to put him and Bayliss to the assagais. But Kolo could afford to let vengence wait. He sat down again, his red mouth twisting into a cruel smile. His upper lips snarled back, closing the black tunnels of his nostrils and exposing gleaming teeth, through which words came with the hiss of escaping steam.

"Dose words you shall eat, crawling on your belly, your back lashed with hippo thong. You shall eat dose words wid filth."

The tornadic ferocity of it had knocked Robert into a heap. He pulled his wits together to arrest the emir's passion.

"Emir!" he barked. "You are making big belly talk. Do you want whites with soldiers and guns driving you out of El Nadir?"

"Guns!" spat Kolo. "Guns! Aye, you talk of guns. Without dem you whites are less than de Fulani. You lord it over us by inventions," he charged, as if the whites had an unfair advantage in their inventions.

He launched a bitter racial tirade, his face pushed forward to Robert, the features working with passion, his black Adam's apple working up and down to the thunder of his words.

"Are de whites as strong as de Fulani? Can dey endure de heat ob de trail better? No. Dey come to our land and get sick. Dey travel in litters. Our land is greater dan dere land, so dey come and spy and steal. Dey come to power over us 'cause we haf no guns. Are dey better peoples? No. Dey drink evil drinks and brawl. Dey buy and sell like de old women of the markets. Dey are big-bellied. May Allah smite dem for dere pride!"

His eyeballs rolled, his nostrils expanded and contracted frightfully, whilst his tenuous, strong hands gripped his burnoose, as if to rend it asunder. The veins stood out on his neck and forehead in purple streaks.

Racial jealousy could not account for such passion. Robert sensed a personal hurt behind it; perhaps a bitter experience during the sojourn on the Gold Coast. Cold chills trickled down Robert's spine.

Chance had put two whites completely at the mercy of Kolo's passion. He was on his high horse, in his own town, an autocrat answerable to no laws, an autocrat surrounded by his subjects, whose swarthy faces revealed a vicious expectation, as if they had been invited there to see their emir make a Roman holiday with the whites.

"Emir."

Robert slid the tip of a wet tongue along dry lips.

"Emir, there's something in what you say. But, again, you're wrong. The whites do not come to lord it over the Africans. We come to trade. All nations trade with one another. You say we come to power by our inventions. Exactly. Inventions are the offspring of trade. For every war machine invented a dozen are invented in industry. Trade is the real conqueror."

He floundered on jerkily, hampered by the thought that perhaps his English was obscure to Kalo but unable to express himself fluently in Fulani. His main object was to distract Kolo's rage.

"The great Sokoto Company wishes to be at peace with all. I represent the company. We live by and thrive by trade.

His voice became more confident, for he saw he had Kolo listening and by pure chance he was talking along the very lines that would lead to a suggestion later of a treaty.

"The company will not interfere in your customs, your religion, your titular rights. Kolo, I can make you the greatest emir that ever sat on a sheepskin in El Nadir. I can give you a real greatness, not a mythical greatness founded on an idle tale of ivory treasure."

Robert threw in that last by way of disabusing Kolo of his notion that he, Robert, was fooled by a fake. He went on to say there was no quarrel between Kolo and him. He was there merely to talk business.

He made a hit with the fiery fellow by offering to take spear with his best hunters and go out against the leopards, race his strongest on foot or in saddle, ride his wildest horses or stand up against any Fulani with only the weapond nature gave man, a pair of fists.

He was getting along at a fine pace, when one of the seated Fulani pulled him up with a growl that their emir had called them there to witness the trial of the whites.

KOLO seemed to jerk out of a trance into which he had fallen under Robert's strange salesmanship talk. Whilst Robert was recovering from his surprize at the revelation that Kolo was going to throw down the gauntlet to the whole white race by putting him and Bayliss on trial, for Allah alone knew what, the emir spoke to a Fulani guard in mimicry of the voice of a foppish Englishman.

"Officah, what is the chawge?"

"Brawling and disturbing the peace, your honor," magpied the man, evidently repeating a phrase learned by rote.

Robert missed a couple of heart beats. Not for nothing had Kolo with infinite vengeful patience dinned the English vocables into the Fulani guard. The studied cunning of it!

Kolo had sent the warning message of Bayliss' flight with the object of bringing about a muss up between him and Robert which would substantiate a charge of brawling and disturbing the peace. The emir was avenging a personal experience with the charge. He had once been hailed before an English magistrate on the Gold Coast. But this was no play trial. Kolo was out to avenge his grudge. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, according to the law.

He raised a hand to an imaginary mustache and twirled an imaginary waxed end. He only wanted a monocle to complete the imitation of an English fop. He spoke with an affected drawl:

"Well, you bally white's, what have you to say for yourselves? You can't go brawling y'know. I shall give each of you ten days."

Robert quickly saw his course, to take it all as play, with a compliment to the chief actor.

"I'll hand it to you, Kolo. You've got that white noodle down pat. Give me his name, and if ever I meet him ——"

Kolo broke in on the text passionately:

"He called me a bally niggah. Me! Emir of El Nadir! I told him there was no negro blood in me. He said, 'All black are niggahs to me' and 'A niggah by any other name would smell as sweet.' "

Robert cursed the white fool. Kolo meant mischief. There was no doubting that he had had the insult in mind and intended paying it back the moment he had set eyes on Robert. To find something to distract his rage gave Robert more mental exercise in one minute than a month of Oxford studies. But there was a lot of the barbarian in Kolo, which is to say his mind could be easily diverted, and what better diversion than an appeal to cupidity and his pride in his emirate.

He started in with an apology for the white magistrate.

"Allah made such, Kolo, that real men might learn patience by them. And whilst I'm in the apologetic vein, let me say that Bayliss here regrets those hasty words he let fly a while ago. Between ourselves, Kolo, Bayliss is quite a little upset. Let's get down to what's good for you and me," he said in his best placating tone.

He hurried on with his former tune of what he could do in the way of making El Nadir the great trade center of Sokoto, till Kolo arrested his flow of persiflage by a play of catching his words in his hands, throwing them on the ground and spitting on them. This was a trick of his sire the Hyena.

But it lacked vigor, savoring rather of a big-belly play before the Fulani. Kolo would not have listened to the trade talk had he not been interested. Robert was satisfied that he had salted the ground for a trade treaty.

It seemed a propitious moment for a quick exit. Robert nudged Bayliss' foot, the whilst addressing Kolo in a final tone:

"Emir, I have spoken good words. You will find them so. If you want the company's barter let me know soon, as I must away, for the blacks at the station are without a massa."

As he turned to make a bold exit he saw a new expression leap into Kolo's face at his last words, an expression obscure, yet fraught with cunning calculation. It stamped itself on Robert's mind. But the immediate business of escape was too urgent for him to give it thought just then.

If anything, he was glad to have said something to occupy Kolo's mind while he and Bayliss stepped for the outer yard, the Fulani in their way rolling aside in their surprize at their action and lack of orders from the emir.

Robert did not stop till he was clear of the place, and for once Bayliss seemed glad to keep him company.

"Gee!" he breathed in the street. "That was touch and go."

"Yes," said Bayliss. "Luckily you gave the nigger something else to think about when you said the station was without a white in charge, or we'd be in that court yet."

"Yes, but what's his kink?" asked Robert.

Bayliss gave him an astonished sideglance and shied off the question.

"I told you to go while the going was good. You've got him started."

"I thought it was you who got him started. But no matter. Yes, you advised me to clear out of El Nadir, very unselfishly." Robert remarked drily, and then took up the matter of the balance sheets, not aggressively but in sympathy with the foolish position in which Bayliss had put himself.

"Look here, Bayliss, let's talk sense. Let me diagnose your case. You've put in a term or two with the company, but haven't gone ahead or drawn down any bonuses according to what you think you deserve. You were winding up at N'doni; going home. Then a strong temptation came your way.

"Old Abwol died and young Kolo returned from the Gold Coast, a half-educated prince who you thought would trade off the supposed ivory for your loot. Well, the treasure tale proved a myth, so last night you were getting out. But why leave the headloads behind?"

Bayliss was so slow in reply that Robert suspected an invention.

"I couldn't get the stuff down the Sierra Leone trail, with you sending runners to British officials to be on the lookout."

Robert pointed out that he could restore the barter and silver loot to the station and thus be free to go downriver to the waiting launch and go home to collect his bonus and deferred pay.

Bayliss slouched half a dozen steps, then said:

"I'll turn the stuff over to you here and now. The silver is in one of the packs." His voice soared to a hopeful note. "That would square you and me."

"It ought to, but—" Robert suspiciously studied the puffy face under the sun helmet

—"where's the kink, Bayliss? Kolo was teasing you about his honorable hospitality in guarding your headloads and also in giving you escort when leaving. What's your jam?"

Bayliss stared off at an indefinite point in the air. Robert waited, but evidently Bayliss could not answer without exposing himself.

"They are still your property?" he persisted.

"Yes—" Bayliss hung a question mark to the affirmative. Then his moroseness returned. "I've said I'll make the headloads over to you here. That leaves me free to go with the balance sheets. Take it or leave it, that's where I stand."

"And if I accept the loot here am I free to take it out of El Nadir?" Robert queried suspiciously.

"'Course."

"Then why couldn't you take them with you last night?"

"Who said I couldn't?"

"Said it yourself when you refused my offer to accept the stuff at the station and cry quits. You're a chump. You're in some sort of a bad fix. You'd give anything to be free and aboard the Guara launch."

"Have it any way you like," huffed Bayliss, and seemed on point of turning back to the emir's palace when an inspiration struck him.

"Say, Chatteris, you're going after a treaty, aren't you?"

"Go on," Robert invited what was coming.

"Then turn the headloads over to Kolo as the consideration in the treaty bargain—the dash, as we say."

"Now isn't that nice and thoughtful of you," cooed Robert. "For the second time you have told me that those headloads can't be taken out of town. Bayliss, it pains me to say it to a fellow officer of the Royal Sokoto Company, but I repeat, you are a chump. You are simply holding us both up here. I'm going to get those balance sheets. I'll stay here till I've worried your hair white."

"Oh, no you won't," Bayliss retorted with an assurance he had not hitherto shown. "You'll soon be hastening to N'doni on the trail of Kolo and a bunch of raiders. Didn't you see that look on his face when you said the station was without a massa?"

Robert breathed sharply.

"Well," said Bayliss briskly, "I guess that gives you something to think about."

Upon which he swung on his heels and with shoulders down went back towards the palace, secure in the knowledge that Kolo's race hatred was for the time being diverted by meditations of an attack on the station.

III

"SOMETHING to think about——"

Robert dropped down on his heels on the floor of his smelly quarters. Bayliss had handed Robert a whole lot of material for cogitation. Nor were his thoughts dismal. Far otherwise. Never at any time since his entry into El Nadir had his thoughts been so aggressively optimistic.

He had Kolo nibbling on a treaty, and Bayliss was so fixed that for some reason he could not get away with the loot and hardly likely to try to slip away again with the balance sheets before coming to terms. But the pith of the good feeling lay in Bayliss' warning that Kalo was meditating a raid on the station.

"Something to think about," Bayliss had said, meaning something to worry about.

But strangely, Robert was not worrying over the possibility of a raid. Far otherwise. He was incubating an idea of turning such a trade to his own service. Kolo had given ear to the trade talk under circumstances most unfavorable, in the midst of his race rage against whites, and enthroned on his sheepskin in pride and autocracy.

Robert nursed his idea into a bold conviction that could he tackle the emir on barter and treaty at the trading station he could turn the trick. And here was Kolo meditating a visit to the station.

A visit? Well, not exactly. But it would not be Robert's fault if he did not convert the raid into a visit. He did some strenuous thinking, which eventuated in his bidding Omo to stand before the room and shoo off any curious natives who came there while at his back he donned turban, burnoose and moccasins and again applied charcoal to the bridge of his nose, around his eyes, which showed above the turban fold he wound across the lower part of his face. Then he blacked his hands and walked forth, to all appearance an African.

In the town he tried out his disguise in daylight and his ability to speak the dialect in his throat like a native on three Fulani gossiping in the marketplace. Satisfied with the result, he headed for the emir's palace. Arrived there he passed Bayliss in the outer yard unrecognized. In the inner yard he found the sunrise court dispersed. Kolo was standing in talk with a visiting *shehu*—petty chief.

With the slouching steps of a Fulani he approached the emir, saluting by touching finger tips to turban and over his heart. Then he stood by, an ideal listener to the talk till the emir noted his presence and turned inquiring eyes to him.

Robert said he was a wayfarer, come to pay his respects to the Great Emir of El Nadir. He said he had come from N'doni. The emir bit.

"Did you see the place of the whites?" he asked eagerly.

"Yea," said Robert. "It is built of iron. Its houses are so large a hundred men might sleep under one roof. The houses are filled with rich barter."

If Kolo had any idea of raiding the station it was Robert's plan to give the idea a big boost. Kolo's next question revealed his mind traveling fast in the direction of Robert's most fervent wish.

"Are the blacks at the station armed in guns?"

"A few watchmen have old flintlocks. But without a white to lead them their blood is as water. The blacks keep the gates closed and tremble behind the stockade praying for the massa's return. The massa is away. They tremble because there is rich loot there."

Kolo's eyes looked off into space fiercely. The true son of the old raider and slaver, Abwol, was coming through the thin veneer of civilization which Kolo had acquired on the Gold Coast. Robert could name the devils that danced in the black eyes—loot, vengeance on the whites, glory, savage lust for wild adventure.

"Twenty swift riders," Robert softly insinuated. "Who would know them, their faces swathed in turbans. Who would know them from Tawarek, Shua or Kaduna? Whence came they? Nobody knows. They came in the night, and in the night they went; twenty men leading pack horses."

Thus Robert planted the details in Kolo's mind; made the thing easy and plausible, as it were. Kolo said nothing, naturally. He looked off into space as if he were not listening, but Robert noted a setting of his black jaws and a controlled vibration of the nostrils. Satisfied that the seed had fallen on nurturing soil, Robert sidled away as quietly as he had come.

Kolo was not the kind to let an idea addle. It behooved Robert to take speedy action along the lines of his thought-out plan. Back at his lodgings, he told Omo to take the two horses out of town and hobble them inconspicuously near the N'doni trail, the while he was removing his native disguise.

When Omo returned from the errand he found the massa stretched on the floor. Robert signed to him to lie down.

"Better try and sleep, Omo. We will be in saddle all night."

But it turned out that Kolo was making certain moves that did not jibe with Robert's ideas. Along toward sundown one of his guards with a clumsy two-edged sword in a leather girdle appeared and pleasantly explained that he was there to see that the white man waited the recovery of the emir from a sudden sickness before departing from El Nadir, for, he said, it was the emir's intention to escort his guest honorably.

Robert inquired if the other white man was also honored with a guard. Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he asked with perfectly grave face how long Kolo had set himself to be sick. The Fulani fell into the trap, replying that Robert would be guarded for three days.

The naïveté of it! Kolo was establishing an alibi of sickness in his palace over the duration of the raid, which he evidently expected to accomplish in three days.

Robert had to figure out a way to rid himself of the guard. But not for nothing had the head of the Royal Sokoto Company complimented him on possessing initiative and resource. After a bit of thought he sent the dependable Omo to get a reed mat or old cloth to hang over the open entrance. He complained to the guard of the annoying curiosity of the riffraff.

Had Agent General McNair been a witness to the means which Robert took to circumvent the guard he would have congratulated himself on his selection of Robert Chatteris for the important N'doni agency.

When presently Omo returned with an old reed mat, which he had probably helped himself to with the African philosophy that it is sometimes necessary to steal a thing that can not be otherwise acquired, the guard kindly helped Robert stretch it across the opening or half way across. That done squatted against the edge of the wall that divided Robert's room from the next, Robert dispatched Omo for four stout sticks about a man's height. In a few minutes the Jerki was back with three herder's sticks and pilgrim's staff.

The guard was very curious about what the white man wanted with the sticks. He screwed his head around the wall to watch, as Robert was aware. In fact an astute observer might have said that Robert was angling for the guard's curiosity, so profoundly mysterious was he in his movements. He laid two sticks parallel on the floor with about the width of a man's body between them, with such particularness to get them so-so that he was continually blocking the vision of the guard. The fellow pivoted on his hams and thrust head and shoulders into the room.

Ah! now he could dodge his head this way and that way when the white man's body was in the way. Robert laid the other two sticks across the ends of the parallels, making an oblong frame. He seemed to have a lot of trouble in getting them just as he wanted them, and every time he moved he blocked the vision of the guard.

The Fulani, hypnotized by curiosity now, dragged into the room. Robert picked up the unwound turban of his native disguise and threw it across his shoulder. Then he bent to adjust the crosssticks at a corner of the oblong right under the nose of the guard.

OF A sudden the turban cloth over his shoulder took life. It flashed through the air. Before the guard knew what was happening it had looped itself around his head and a pair of hard knots at the nape of his neck were twisting the turban in a way that snagged it into his mouth, throttling outcry.

His head was in a vice, the whole strain of his resistance thrown on his neck muscle. If the Fulani had known that Robert had hung up athletic records that had left Oxford with a prodigous respect for Rhodes scholars he might have saved himself a lot of futile struggling, which ended in his wrists and ankles being bound at the cross of the sticks with torn strips of his own burnoose, the same bindings serving to tie the sticks.

With Omo working in silent partnership and intuitional understanding, they raised the guard on the frame on a slant against the wall, in a position in which he could neither shout, jerk, twist or roll. It was a nasty necessity, but Robert comforted himself that the fellow was as hard as hickory. Anyway his plight would be discovered within an hour, when his supper was brought.

All Robert wanted was to let Kolo fool himself that he, Robert, was safe under guard, lest the emir smell a rat and call off the raid. Taking the guard's turban, in the place of his own which gagged the fellow, Robert hurriedly assumed his native disguise and set out with Omo in the brief dusk between sundown and moonrise.

Omo had hobbled the mounts in a *wadi*—a shallow ravine—at the edge of the tilled fields around the town. In five minutes then were on the trail. Robert rode about ten mile to a rise that commanded a view of the trail. There he waited to sight the raiders and assure himself of the actuality of the raid. He calculated that Kolo would have his men slip out of town in twos and threes after supper and rendezvous on the trail. Also he had to make sure that Kolo was not bringing a whole squadron.

An anxious half hour dragged out, when suddenly Robert sighted a string of bobbing burnooses, looking in the white moon like washing flapping on a line. A distant snap-count showed about a score of men, and as they neared the rise it was seen that each man led a horse by halter. That was according to expectations, yet Robert thrilled to a sense of impending danger.

In part that was the psychological effect of the wild night riders on his strained nerves, but also he had a belated thought that he had perhaps started something that he would not be able to control. A terrifying sense of responsibility settled on him as he wheeled his mount and cantered for N'doni. He had incited and abetted a raid on the company's station.

His native disguise enabled him to ride through the villages, for had he passed as a white man the news would have reached Kolo. But the Fulani had to detour the villages, for the emir would not want to leave a trail which the company's investigators could trace to El Nadir. Thus Robert was able to keep an easy lope without fear of being overtaken. He made the station next evening just as the full moon grinned on the edge of the plain.

The station was dark and silent, the gates closed. His shout brought a watchman, whom he ordered to leave the gates open. The man, confused by the voice of a massa that did not agree with the horseman in native dress, jammed the muzzle of his flintlock in Robert's face. Robert snatched off his turban in nick of time to save his brains from being blown out.

He immediately set about preparing to receive the raiders. His preparations were peculiar. He sent men into the town to buy sheep, fowls, yams and plantains, while others he had dig roasting pits in the center of the compound, between the barter store and the barracks of the colored help.

"Get a good lot of glowing charcoal for the pits," he ordered.

"Sah," said a Sierra Leonese, "you fit to make a feast?"

Robert nodded.

"The best adjunct to salesmanship is a barbecue," he chirped in a happy little talk with himself.

To the black he said that the Emir of El Nadir was paying a visit. He stressed the word visit. But the Sierra Leonese let out a frightened roar.

"Oh, oh, oh! De Emir ob El Nadir done come! We all go die one-time—at once."

Panic! The blacks took up the cry and ran around yelling as if a mad dog were loose. Kolo did not have to earn a reputation for frightfulness; he inherited one from Abwol.

"De Fulani done come to eat us up!" shrieked the blacks, reverting to an old cry of cannibal days when prisoners were eaten.

The panic had to be stopped. Robert tore into the blacks, knocking the wind out of the shouters. Tore into them with fists and tongue. What were they yelling for? The emir was paying a friendly visit. Didn't they see that he, Robert, was preparing a feast?

He hustled them into activity, to distract their fears. The pits were half-filled with live charcoal, the sheep, yams, fowls which were brought from the town were packed in wet clay in fleece, feathers and skins and entrails and laid on the charcoal, the pits then being filled in with earth. That done, Robert had reed mats laid near the pits under hurricane lanterns which he had hung on strings from poles decorated with streamers of colored cloth.

In the barter store he had the good luck to find a case of colored toy balloons, which the company's London buyer evidently thought would tickle the childish delight of barbarians. They did. In the fun of blowing them up and hanging them on the lantern strings the blacks for the moment forgot their fright.

Robert's next move was to hunt up all the firearms on the station. Six watchmen had flintlocks, and in a wall rack in the chop-room were three old carbines and an ancient blunderbuss. Robert conscripted four quaking Sierra Leonese to shoulder the chop-room battery. Promptly they became vociferous conscientious objectors.

"We no fit to fight. We no be fight men. We be gen'men clerks. Our 'greement wid de company done say nothing 'bout fighting."

"Shut up! Who said you were going to fight? You're only a parade," Robert catapulted at them. "The emir comes in friendship, I tell you. He returns my visit to El Nadir," he lied. "Do exactly as I tell you, or you'll make acquaintance with the headman's hippo thong when the visit is over."

He led his trembling army up the outside gangway to the balcony of the living quarters over the barter store. The balcony ran all around the deck and was protected by a sheet-iron balustrade and a long slope of sheet-iron roof. The gangway swung on hinges which allowed it to be raised by a castle portcullis. In fact the place was a fort, invulnerable to lighted arrows or the swords and spears of African warfare.

Robert was following a plan worked out at the House of the Strangers. He served ammunition to his gallant army of ten, with minute instructions which he impressed on the blacks by many repetitions. He was taking too desperate a risk to chance any slip. He kept an outward appearance of calm and couched his voice in a quiet matter-of-fact authoritativeness to keep before the blacks the illusion of a friendly visit. He had Omo prepare his bath, as if to prepare for a visitor.

Omo obeyed, though he feared that the massa had got a touch of the sun in El Nadir. He was one black in the station who was not fooled by the talk of a friendly visit. He had been behind the scenes in El Nadir. Nor could he jibe the roasting-pits with the gunmen on the balcony.

"Sah," he queried as he poured water into Robert's bath, "you done make it open palms in de compound and closed fists on de balcony?"

Robert's answer was a comforting grin as he stripped off his native disguise and got into the bath. He washed off the accumulated sweat and grime of several days, as coolly as if he were in a hotel, but his ears were alert for the thudding of hoofs, his nerves tensed for a hurried fling on of clothes.

A creamy shave, vigorous brushing of his mop of tangled dark hair, then donning of the white mess dress of the tropics—the natty little jacket with the gold-braided shoulder straps of an officer of the Royal Sokoto Company—and he was ready, waiting.

Nothing in his leisurely movements suggested a tensed expectancy of a whirlwind of wild raiders and the yell of rampant Mohammedanism—"*Allah il Allah!*"—which turns negro blood to water, for it stirs atavistic memories of the times when the Arab slavers swept the Niger.

ROBERT lighted a cigar, with no self-confession that his nerves needed it. His peculiar arrangements for the reception made, he was now up against a grueling, waiting suspense. Whisperings and restless movements among the gunmen crouched behind the balustrade showed the fear that gripped them and what little help Robert could look for from them if things took a wrong turn.

The clerks and houseboys that came and went about trifling duties gave him sly, fearsome scrutinies. He must not let them sense his strain. Controlling an itch to pace the balcony he took a careless stand at the top of the gangway, in the light of a lantern hung there, that his blacks could see him, in full dress, smoking, debonaire, calmly waiting the expected guest.

He had a happy thought to set a clerk at the chop-table and have him write a list of the loot in the headloads, including the silver. That made it seem that his mind was occupied with the ordinary affairs of the station. Anyway he had a certain need of the list.

He stood by the clerk, apparently solely interested in his work. But the open ends of the room gave him views of the compound on one side and the open stockade gate on the other. As the moments lengthened and he became inured to the strain his thoughts were freer. His mind roved off to the situation of Bayliss under guard in the emir's palace.

No doubt still morosely regarding the headloads which for some mysterious reason he had not dared take with him on his attempted flight for all that he had said he was free so to do. Robert notched a mental note that if he and Kolo got together, as he prayed and hoped, he would ask the emir for light on the little big joke he had on Bayliss in the matter of the headloads.

Of a sudden he sighted a figure at the gates. His gaze froze in startled consternation on a horseman in nothing but turban and loincloth, reined in at the gate and calmly surveying the station.

A scout! A spy!

Robert had expected a whirlwind dash of the Fulani and proud scorn of any defense which the despised blacks could put up. The cautious spying knocked all his calculation into a heap. The success of his plan depended on his understanding of the psychology of the Fulani.

He experienced the sickening sensation of one who has gambled everything on a false throw. He had to make a decision fraught with terrifying consequences. He thought not of his own life, for if he were killed and the station wiped out the deficit would never be known. Thus his father would not be ruined by being called on to make good on the bond.

The sting of responsibility came from another quarter. The lives of the helpless blacks and the company's property would be the spoils of the mocking, triumphant young Kolo.

But to make a hurried last-moment change, to close the gates and call on the ten trembling gunmen to put up a real defense would be to invite panic and annihilation. Robert sucked in air through clenched teeth. He had tricked Kolo there with the object of securing a treaty. Even if he put up a successful fight it would only serve to make it closed fists between him and the emir for all time, and kill all hope of a treaty,

He determined to go through with the set program; even took a thought to improve on it. Most of the clerks, he knew, possessed harmonicas, which were an important item in the company's barter. So he called for harmonica men to tune a dance. That served the double purpose of distracting the blacks while at the same time presenting a customary phrase of African honorable hospitality, which is to receive the guest with dancing.

The scout at the gate gave an imitation of the cackling snarl of a laughing hyena. It was immediately answered by a soft mushing of unshod hoofs on powdery sands. A formless mass of horsemen moved out of the shadow of a clump of palms between the compound and the river.

But they were not the burnoosed figures sighted by Robert on the trail. The moonlight gleamed on bodies of polished ebony in meager loincloths. Apparently they were weaponless, too. Yet led horses identified them with Kolo's party. But why had they stripped off their turbans and burnooses?

They rode easily, with complete assurance of easy looting a station given over to dancing and feasting, for the odor of roasting meats lay on the air and the swirl of the harmonicas mingled with laughter of the blacks, who could not see the approach of the Fulani because of the blocking barter store.

Kolo evidently despised the cowardice of the negroes so thoroughly that he had not armed his men, thought Robert, when of a sudden a moonbeam glinted up steel under the forearm of a Fulani.

Robert's blood went cold. The ruffians were palming their long knives. Now he understood they had discarded burnooses for freer action. Close quarters and the deadly knife! Swift, bloody work! Blood your knives, O Fulani! *Allah il Allah!* Slit throats, stab to hearts! Negroes, sons of she slaves, bushmen! Blood! Loot!

There was still time to yell to the blacks to run and shut themselves in their iron barracks, raise the swiveled gangway and send a hail of lead into the Fulani. But Robert hesitated on giving an order that would wipe out all his hopes of a treaty and of clearing up the situation between him and Bayliss. He decided to stay by his peculiar preparations.

He took the list of the loot from the clerk, slipped it into a pocket of his mess jacket, then went and stood under the light at the top of the gangway, in full dress, immaculate, smoking, easy. He was gambling the whole issue on certain nice points in African psychology. He spoke quietly to the gunmen.

"Keep low. Remember instructions. Don't show yourselves till I give the order. Keep your fingers off triggers. A nervous trigger finger will throw a monkey wrench in the whole machinery."

The Fulani appeared around a corner of the store, riding easily, laughing in their black throats. But in the twinkling of an eyelid their laughter collapsed into silence as their petrified stares focussed on the white man who by all natural laws should have been under guard in El Nadir. They came to a sudden halt.

That was Robert's play. Surprize, superstition, suspicion are the dominating factors in the make-up of savages and barbarians. When the Fulani had recovered from their astonishment, when they had digested the fact of the flesh-and-blood reality of the white man, their superstitious natures saw magic in his ability to double himself, or miraculously appear at different and far places. Then his coolness, the unguarded station, the odors of roasting meats, the dancing blacks, the lanterns, balloons, streamers confused their conceptions of the situation and aroused suspicion of a trap.

Robert started down the gangway, erect, smiling. But at the second step he heard a movement among his gunmen and turned in the nick of time to see a Sierra Leonese lay hands on the rope that raised the gangway. The act would have exposed a fear that would have destroyed the psychological effect gained over the petrified Fulani.

Robert yanked the rope through the pulley block and dropped it in a heap at the foot of the gangway, without breaking his descent. Approaching the horsemen he singled out the lean, arrogant face of Kolo.

"Welcome, O Great Emir of the Fulani, overlord of tributary chiefs," he bade. "Welcome in the name of the Great Sokoto Company."

Kolo's eyes darted suspiciously around.

"You see I was expecting you," Robert went on. "You smell the meats and hear the music of the dance of my honorable hospitality," he said, subtly accentuating the last words, which Kolo had played with so mockingly in El Nadir. "But why so humbly clad, O, Great Emir. You see I honor you by being dressed in my best."

He spoke with confidence, for he had the drop on Kolo all ways. The emir was caught red-handed, naked, confused, humiliated. His eyes shifted around like an animal's suspicious of a trap, while he mused aloud, as if voicing his doubts—

"The whites blow words on the air from one point to another. They fly through the air in tents blown on the wind."

"You've got it right, Kolo," said Robert with a feeling that the crisis was safely passed. "The message was blown me that you were coming to N'doni to make treaty palaver, so I blew myself here to receive you honorably."

Stripped of his burnoose and dignity, Kolo was not at all the arrogant autocrat he had been in El Nadir. Still he had a growl left in him.

"I will talk treaty with thee when fowls cut their teeth."

Good. But Robert had hidden a joker in his hospitably honorable reception. He shouted up to the balcony.

"Guard!"

Ten men popped up as one.

"Aim at moon! Fire!

Psychology again. Or Robert's brand of frightfulness. Guns! Old flintlocks and carbines, yes, but still guns. A whistle of slugs and small shot and then their ringing hail on the iron sheds constituted a powerful argument. The Fulani did not wait for the order from their emir, but slipped their knives into their loincloths, and that was that.

"It is the custom of the company to receive honorably a great prince with a guard of honor and a salute, O Emir," Robert brazenly asserted. He caught sight of a roll of burnooses on one of the led horses. "When you and your men have dressed, you will take meat with me."

NOT in that first night of feasting did Robert win over Kolo's racial prejudice and get him to lend ear to his talk of the advantages which would accrue to El Nadir if it accepted the company's barter. There was a whole day spent in showing the emir over the station. Then Robert took down a map from the wall of the chop-room and traced before Kolo's eyes a trail from N'doni to Guda Bara.

"There. You can see for yourself it is as easy for the company to put its goods in Guda Bara as in El Nadir," he said in a tone that implied that personally he was indifferent as to which town got the company's barter.

"It is either a treaty with you or with Guda Bara. I'm giving you first choice, Kolo. But see what happens if Guda Bara gets the company's barter. We can put salt there for the twentieth part of the cost of the salt which the Great Salt Caravan brings to El Nadir's moonlight market twice a year from the Ivory Coast. Our Manchester cloths made by machinery will put El Nadir's weavers out of business. Trade will flow to Guda Bara. Your revenues will go down, and correspondingly Guda Bara's will go up."

Robert's argument was long and packed with horse sense. It left Kolo no alternative other than treaty or ruin. In the end the emir gave in. The document was drawn up, signed, and then sworn on the Koran, Kolo laying his hands on Robert's on the book, and eye to eye, Christian to Mohammedan, but mostly just man to man, the thing was done.

For the consideration to make the contract legally binding, Robert presented Kolo with the list of the silver and goods in the headloads.

"Accept the packs as your dash, Emir. Here is a list of their contents."

He grinned, and Kolo—well, a Fulani does not grin; he guffaws outright.

"And will you give Bayliss a message from me that the Guara waits for him," Robert cooed with dancing eyes. "Tell him from me everything is now O.K."

Kolo nodded.

"One thing more," Robert went on. "Will you enlighten my curiosity on why Bayliss could not take with him the headloads you so honorably guarded for him?"

The question seemed to trouble Kolo, Emir of El Nadir, Lord of the Fulani and all. He glanced at Robert obliquely, then looked off to nowhere, shuffling his feet and giving all the evidence of discomfort. Then he began mumbling something about honorable customs of the Fulani and something about escorting a guest from El Nadir a part of the way on the trail. His sentences ended up in the air; he alternated between sheepishness and sudden bursts of hauteur. In fact Robert had to put two and two together and worry out the meaning.

When at last Bayliss' predicament came to him he burst into a roar of laughter. Robert disentangled from Kolo's mumbles that it was the custom of the Fulani to escort a departing guest, the escort going ahead, for, as Kolo remarked, an enemy stabs in the back. But after parting with the guest the responsibility of the Fulani ended. In fact the escorters could themselves turn brigands and follow up the guest and rob him.

Thus Bayliss had been free to take the headloads out of El Nadir, but he would not have got far with them. In some way he had learned that, and hence his eagerness to turn the loot over to Robert in El Nadir.

Long and loud laughed Robert. He could afford to laugh at peculiar notions of honorable hospitality that had played Bayliss into his hands, and put him in the joyous position of being able to advise the agent general that he had concluded a treaty with El Nadir.

The notification would be construed by three high officials of the company into evidence that Robert Chatteris possessed the valued qualities of initiative and resource in a high degree; the A. G. would congratulate himself for assigning Robert to the important N'doni agency, and would pass to the home office a strong recommendation of Mr. Robert Chatteris for an exceptional bonus.

Fine! But Robert could not escape a feeling that the Old Lady Luck who had been on the job when he tossed off his facetious application for Important Position and Splendid Opportunity had stayed with him.

DRIFTIN' AROUND

by Larry O'Conner

FRIEND o' mine's been tellin' me I'm wastin' all my talents,
  A-chasin' up an' down the earth to see what I can see;
Claims a feller's top-piece must be kinda outa balance,
If he won't go chasin' dollars, but just drifts around, like me.

Talked to me right earnest, like a parson to a sinner;
Showed me several chances I had missed to make my pile;
Told me there was still a chance to prove myself a winner;
Got all het up, an' stuttered, when I couldn't hide my smile.
Eh, well—

Started in to driftin' 'long about my fourteenth summer;
Heard the voice a-callin' and I had to up an' go;
Left the weeds a-smilin' while I went to ride the bumpers;
Never could work up no great attachment for a hoe.

Hit the west afore the cussed bob-wire spoilt the ranges;
Learned to fork a broom-tail, and to tie a holster down;
Sheep an' nesters come along and fetched too many changes—
Forked my hoss an' shifted for another look around.

Stopped awhile amongst the Mormons, bustin' broncs for Johnny Winton;
Had to argue with a jasper who was torturin' a hoss;
He didn't like my words, but found my actions more convincin'—
Took my smokin' Colt an' fanned it for the mountains—and across.

Drifted up to Dawson in the fall of ninety-seven;
Got in early on Bonanza, but the ground, of course, was froze;
Watched the Rory Bory Alice streakin' up the northern heavens;
Swapped the claim in for a grub-stake, and mushed on to see 'em close.

Struck it rich up on the Stewart, but was short of beans an' bacon;
Stopped to nurse a sick chechako that I found beside the trail;
Got back with grub and found a camp, with all the pay-streak taken—
Laid out the guy who'd jumped my claim—an' spent a year in jail.

Drifted down the river when the buds began to open;
Struck it pretty lucky on the third-beach line at Nome;
Saved up my dust an' nuggets, and begun to think of slopin'
Back to see the pigs an' chickens and the other folks at home.

Afore the ice went out I'd booked my passage on the steamer,
But met a geezer out of luck, whose wife an' kid was ill;
Slipped him my poke an' drifted on to seek for pastures greener;
Never left no change of address, so I've got that comin' still.

Drifted up the Tanana, and took a look at Cleary;
Staked out the claim which later made a million for Devore;
The crowd begun to come, and all their clatter made me weary—
Sold out for sixteen hundred, an' went on to see some more.

Drifted south to seek the treasure which them Aztec priests secreted;
Had to shoot a *malo hombre* there, who'd needed it for years;
Shot my roll to give a gal he'd fooled the second chance she needed;
Sloped away because I didn't care for gratitude, nor tears.

Tried my hand at cruisin' rubber on the upper Orinoco;
Saw a thousand kinds of reptiles and a million kinds of flies;
Had a mix-up with some natives who desired to smoke my coco—
Figured I had seen a plenty—any more might hurt my eyes.

Took a whirl at Tia Juana—bucked the wheel an' played the ponies;
Dropped my winnin's at Mexia, when we all went mad on oil;
On the beach at San Diego—lived on crabs and abalones.
If you keep your dough a-rollin' it won't get no chance to spoil.

Next I landed in New Zealand; made a stake in hides an' tallow;
Seen all them furrin countries, and admired 'em all, you bet;
Heard the first, uneasy rumble of the oil-strike at Katalla—
Drifted up to have a look around an', well, I'm driftin' yet.

Gittin' gray above the ears. When the trees are bloomin',
I think sometimes I'd like to settle down and take a rest.
Find a mate, and raise some kids, the same as other humans.
To mate with me she'd have to be of Gypsy blood, I guess.

Lots of time to settle down when the gray is thicker;
Lots of sights to see, and lots of chancey games to play;
Here and there around the world the friendly camp-fires flicker—
A-callin' me to come and see—and I am on my way.

It's true I haven't laid away no stacks of the *dinero*.
I've made some friends that Coal Oil Johnny's millions couldn't buy.
I've always paid my way and snapped my fingers at tomorrow.
I've yet to meet the man I couldn't look square in the eye.

A-driftin' round the world to watch the different stars a-shinin';
A-reachin' out a helpin' hand to them as needs it most;
A-makin' my mistakes, and payin' for 'em without whinin'—
The distant trails are callin' and I'm off, so—*adios!*

THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-all Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

BY THE time this reaches you Negley Farson will probably be going down the Danube in a motorboat, heading for Yalta or some Crimean Black port. A word from him concerning his story in this issue:

Chicago, Illinois.

Not that it makes any difference, but the Gippy atrocity mentioned in the last part of "Four Annas" actually happened. ——, commanding the ——, gave it to me as true. He also said that the Punjabis were turned loose in that village, given carte blanche, and that some four hundred Gippies went west as a consequence. A bit of unwritten history!—NEGLEY FARSON.

THE woes of editors are so numerous that there isn't much use in moaning about them but writers also have a good many, including the one that editors claim to have more than they. Luckily, by stating his case to Camp-Fire in advance, he can protect himself in such cases as this one presented by T. Samson Miller in connection with his novelette in this issue:

Belvedere, Marin Co., California.

In writing, say, a story of the West, one can use for location such names as Henrytown, Jonesville, Hangman's Gulch, Sweetwater Valley, and the names will convey to the reader a pretty good idea of place and location without fear of the author being jacked up on some minor point in topography. Troublesome experiences have taught me that to place the action of an African story in an actual locale is to invite angry denunciations of one's veracity. The editors of *Adventure* will recall an instance in which a man in Nigeria abused me for placing on the bank of the Niger a trading station that, he asserted, occupied an island in the Niger. As I happened to have had command of that particular station I ought to have known. It happened that we abandoned the island station as unhealthy and built on the mainland.

In another case I received a letter telling me I did not know what I was writing about, as a certain village I named did not exist, whereas a large village which should have been given in my story was not mentioned. As I knew the locality minutely, I took the trouble to get into correspondence with the commissioner of the district. Lo, the villagers had changed the name of their village to fool certain evil spirits that had come to haunt it and had brought the spotted fever. I know of villages in Nigeria that take the name of each and every new king.

So in "A Prince of Africa" I play safe and use fictitious names, though I could use true names, for I was the goat in the silver theft.—THOMAS SAMSON MILLER.

IT'S always interesting to hear just how closely Hugh Pendexter follows actual history in his stories. Also it's just as well for any of our authors to state in advance just what course he steers among the often conflicting statements of historians and personal witnesses. Among other things, it saves him a lot of criticisms from readers who could not otherwise know that he had already weighed the evidence pretty well all around.

Norway, Maine.

I have taken very few liberties with the actual facts that are worked into the story, "Pards." Bill Waggle was killed on the "Divide" instead of where I kill him in the story. See Eugene Weston's account of "Desperadoes, Horse Thieves and Their Fate," as included in Capt. B. F. Rockafellow's "History of Fremont County." Charley Dodge, according to Rockafellow, died of small-pox at Fort Hall, Washington Territory.

LOMSON is drawn from an apostate Mormon, who killed a man in Dotson's wagon-train, and who later became the White Chief of a small band of young Utes, and something of whose history is given by John Y. Nelson in his "Fifty Years on the Trail," as prepared and presented by Harrington O'Reilly. There was a Lost Doyle Mine. Jim Doyle of the lower Huerfano found it. He took samples of the ore to Santa Fé, where it assayed out one-half pure silver. Doyle was an old mountain man, thoroughly reliable. He died in Sante Fé on the eve of returning to work his discovery. See Richard Irwin's "History of Custer County." In Col. Richard Dodge's "Our Wild Indians" will be found quite a full account of the practise of giving medicine-ponies to the Bad Spirit for an escape from a tight corner. The Utes and some of the

Plains tribes usually fulfilled their vow by giving broken down, worthless animals. The Indians in Oregon and Washington, according to the same authority, were more conscientious in consecrating such ponies, and set aside sound animals. There was an eccentric young man at Cañon City in the early days who used the "cold, dry process" in assaying ore, *i.e.*, a lead pencil and a piece of paper. He was known as "Euclid."

FOR mortuary customs of Utes see Dr. H. C. Yarrow's exhaustive work, "Mortuary Customs of the N. A. Indians." The Arapahos claim they raided some distance into the Ute country and stole tribal medicine, a little stone figure, but were forced to scatter to hide their trail when pursued. The Arapahos claim the warrior carrying the stolen medicine was killed and the stone figure was never recovered.

In Rockafellow's "History of Fremont County" he gives quite a full account of Leaper, the Warder of Warder's Hill, and I have drawn the man from that description. The historian does not give the name of the victim who was rescued by the woodchopper and who died as the result of his Mazeppa ride before he could give evidence. But he did describe the man and the location of his hut so that Col. Farnham could effect the villain's capture. With no witnesses to appear against Leaper, Gen. Sam Browne, then prosecuting attorney for Colorado, was compelled to enter a *nolle prosequi.* I have no record of what became of Vince Moore.

INCLUDED in the "History of Fremont County" is Captain John McCannon's account of the "Bloody Espinosas" and how the writer killed one of them, as mentioned in my story. This writer minimizes Tom Tobin's work in tracking down and killing the last of the Espinosas near the summit of Sangre de Cristo Pass, and says he was paid $500, was aided by a squad of soldiers, and was already in the pay of, and furnished rations by, the Government. I regret I have mislaid a letter from an old-timer who knew Tobin well and who wrote me about his rounding up the last of the Espinosas and declared Tobin never received a penny of reward except as a purse was made in New Mexico. Contemporary writers on this series of fearful murders differ much. One Coloradan places the date in the spring of '62 and another in '64. Some do full justice to Tobin, while others damn with faint praise. But from all I have read Tobin was the man who brought home the bacon. Gabriel Bowen discovered a silver mine and lamented it was not lead, as I have described in the story.

Jack Smith, the Cheyenne breed, is said by Captain Rockafellow to have led a band of 15 Cheyennes a short distance below Pueblo and to have ambushed a Government outfit of three wagons, and to have killed three soldiers, a blacksmith and his wife and two children. This was in August, 1864. The writer continues, in part: ". . . the writer, after the battle of Sand Creek, where Smith was taken prisoner, heard Smith confess to the above account (the ambush) and had the satisfaction of seeing him shot and instantly killed in his father's lodge by a soldier."

CHARLEY HARRISON was criminally prominent in early Denver days and escaped south. While returning with a band of ne'er-do-wells he and his men were all killed by the Osage Indians, as I have mentioned. Captain Rockafellow believes too much credit has been given Green Russell and his band of Georgians for "starting the gold excitement in this country in 1858." Rockafellow was a member of the original expedition, which he says covered half the distance to the mountains before Russell and his party joined it forty miles west of the Pawnee Forks. He gives the credit to George Hicks, lawyer and judge, a man of the Cherokee nation, and in his youth a war-chief. Hicks also saved the life of General Andrew Jackson when he was surrounded by Choctaws, says Rockafellow, and was eminently fitted to be leader of the expedition which made the first discovery in what is now Colorado. Rockafellow's account of the forming of the expedition, names of the Indians and whites, and their adventures on the way to, and while in, the mountains makes a vivid narrative and impresses me with the truth of his assertion that the Cherokee, and not the white man, started the tremendous rush to the new gold fields.—PENDEXTER.

CAMP-FIRE is not only interested in the campaign to enact anti-weapon laws but is violently opposed to it. Judging from the flood of letters that has been pouring in for several years past, its opposition is practically unanimous. Some comrades, including myself, have opposed such laws on the ground that they violated the right guaranteed by the Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. Our comrade, Daniel J. McKenna, a lawyer of Toledo, Ohio, though strongly opposed to anti-weapon legislation, has already at Camp-Fire presented the opinion that it could not be defeated on the ground of unconstitutionality.

He is shoulder to shoulder with the rest of us in wanting these proposed anti-weapon laws defeated, but, quite logically, he wants us to fight them by the best and surest methods we can find. If, as he believes, the charge of unconstitutionality can not be maintained, then it is only common sense not to waste our time and effort on it but to marshal our opposition along other lines.

Simply because he believes, as do the rest of us, that vital interests of the people are at stake and because he desires to help our common cause by doing what he can to clarify the situation for all of us, he has voluntarily gone to a great deal of trouble to search out and analyze all court decisions, legal interpretations and general principles of law bearing upon the question and to present his findings for our consideration. Camp-Fire's very hearty thanks are certainly due him.

In my own mind it is clear from the cold facts he has dug out that, whether or not the proposed anti-weapon laws be unconstitutional, they are not likely to be declared so and that, as Mr. McKenna says, the wise thing to do is to try to keep them from being passed instead of hoping they will be declared invalid afterward.

In his findings there is an interest even broader and more important than the scope of the anti-weapon question. It is so broad a matter that I shall not even attempt to point it out, but the inevitable conclusion is that there is no sure safety or reasonable hope in the long run for any people attempting self-government except the active and intelligent participation in public affairs of the mass of individuals composing that people.

Here are the facts as presented by Mr. McKenna, with only such interpretation and induction from himself as seemed to him necessary for cohesion and conclusion. We turn to the other lawyers among us for any differences or additions.

First Mr. McKenna's letter:

Toledo, Ohio

If it produces any discussion and argument, even if the latter be hostile, my purpose will be served. My stand is that people should not rely solely upon what they consider the constitutional protection of their rights. This may sometimes fail them. They should get out on election day and put the fear of the Lord into their legislators. The idea of expecting any bad law to be declared unconstitutional by the courts is apt to lead to a mental flabbiness on the part of the electorate and to a relaxation of the vigilance which is the price of liberty. In the absence of a written Constitution, citizens are actually put on their mettle in seeing that their rights are respected. In actual self-defense, such citizens have to exercise care in electing only men who will not trample on their rights and that is why, I think, the English people enjoy more personal liberty than we do. What we need is more care in preventing the passage of unjust laws rather than in curing them after they have been enacted.

I MUST confess that I did not realize the magnitude of the task until commencing it. Most of the text-books dismiss the subject with a few generalities and lead one to imagine that it is quite shallow. No standard author has sifted it to its foundations. In searching for authorities, I have used all of the standard collections of cases, the Corpus Juris, Cyc., L. R. A., A. L. R., etc., and do not think that many important decisions have been missed.

On the other hand, it would be very remarkable if no errors have crept in. I shall welcome any evidence of their existence. But this little paper probably is reasonably accurate.—DANIEL J. McKENNA.

The Right to Keep and Bear Arms

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how far the right to keep and bear arms extends in the United States. There are three desiderata to be observed, namely:

1. To avoid undue technicality in presenting the subject, which might be proper in an article destined for a legal journal but which is out of place in the present instance.
2. To render as clear and accurate a statement of the existing law as possible.
3. To make the statement as brief as is consistent with clearness and accuracy.

The most widely known pronouncement upon the subject is contained in the Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which hereafter will be designated merely as the Second Amendment. It reads as follows:

"A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

THE first question to be answered is as to the nature of "the right of the people to keep and bear arms." What are its limits and whence does it arise? It is easier to answer the latter half of the question than the former, but when we know the origin, the limits are largely explained.

The right, whatever it may be, is not created by any Constitution. (U. S. *v.* Cruikshank, 1875, 92 U. S. 542. Presser *v.* Illinois, 1885, 116 U. S. 252.) The clauses in the various Constitutions merely guarantee the protection of an already existing right and doubtlessly are based upon the clause in the English Bill of Rights, to which the Prince of Orange assented upon ascending the throne. The clause in which we are interested says:

"That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defense suitable to their condition, and as allowed by law."

The previous clause reads:

"That the raising or keeping of a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace unless it be with the consent of parliament is against the law."

The Bill of Rights was chiefly based upon the Declaration of Rights, passed by the Convention Parliament after the flight of King James, which declared that his creation of a standing army and his disarming of many of his Protestant subjects of militia status were an "endeavor to subvert and extirpate the laws and liberties of this kingdom" and "contrary to law." This would indicate that the purpose of the clause in the Bill of Rights was to allow the people to have arms in order to defend themselves against aggression and oppression.

THAT this applied to them in their capacity as members of the militia and not as individuals would seem to follow from the fact that, from time immemorial, landed proprietors were required to equip and lead their retainers in case of military necessity. When Charles II returned, no other armed force was regarded as lawful.

The right of the individual to bear arms as an individual *may* have existed in these early days but we have no proof that it did. It was not expressly recognized like that of trial by jury. On the other hand, in 1328, it was enacted that no man "go nor ride armed by day or night, in fairs, markets, nor in the presence of the justices or other ministers, nor in no part elsewhere upon pain," etc. Such conduct was likely to terrify persons and lead to a breach of the peace. And the statute of 22 Car. II, ch. 25, para. 3, made certain restrictions of rank and property upon the carrying of arms. These things show that the right to keep and bear arms was not regarded as a fundamental right of every Englishman. (The Constitutional Rights to Keep and Bear Arms, by L. A. Emery, 28 Harv. L. R. 473. This matter of legal history is also discussed in many court decisions.)

THE next point to settle is the extent of the constitutional guaranty. The Second Amendment merely says: "Shall not be infringed." Nothing is said as to whether the Amendment applies to Congress or to the State Legislatures. As a consequence, a few early decisions and number of people not versed in the science of law have imagined that the Second Amendment applies to the acts both of Congress and of the State Legislatures. (Nunn *v.* State, 1846, 1 Ga. 243; *In re* Brickey, 1902, 8 Idaho 897, State *v.* Jumel, 1858, 13 La. Ann. 399. English *v.* State, 1871, 35 Tex. 473.) This is excusable on the part of persons who are not lawyers: it was unpardonable on the part of the courts. For it has long been an elementary principle of constitutional law that the first ten Amendments to the Constitution of the United States apply only to the enactments of Congress and do not limit the powers of the States. And since the case of U. S. *v.* Cruikshank, (1875, 92 U. S. 542), it has been definitely known that the Second Amendment applies only to Congress. There is no longer any doubt or dispute on this matter. (State *v.* Shelby, 1886, 90 Mo. 302; People *v.* Warden, 1913, 139 N. Y. Supp. 277; People *v.* Persce, 1912, 204 N. Y. 397; State *v.* Duke, 1875, 42 Tex. 455; *Ex parte* Ramirez, 1924, Calif., 226 Pac. 914; etc.)

Unless the Constitution of a particular State restricts its own legislature, that State has unlimited power to control the keeping or bearing of arms. (*Ex parte* Ramirez, *supra.*)

A LIST of the pertinent provisions in the various State Constitutions now follows in alphabetical order.

ALABAMA. Sec. 26. "That every citizen has the right to bear arms in defense of himself and the state."

ARIZONA. Sec. 26, Art. II. "The right of the individual citizen to bear arms in defense of himself or the State shall not be impaired, but nothing in this section shall be construed as authorizing individuals or corporations to organize, maintain or employ an armed body of men."

ARKANSAS. Art. I, Sec. 5. "The citizens of this State shall have the right to keep and bear arms for their common defense."

CALIFORNIA. Nothing.

COLORADO. Art. II, No. 13. "That the right of no person to keep and bear arms in defense of his home, person, or property, or in aid of the civil power when thereto legally summoned, shall be called into question; but nothing herein shall be construed to justify the practise of carrying concealed weapons."

CONNECTICUT. Art. First, Sec. 17. "Every citizen has a right to bear arms in defense of himself and the State."

DELAWARE. Nothing.

FLORIDA. Declar. of Rights, Sec. 20. "The right of the people to keep and bear arms in defense of themselves and the lawful authority of this State shall not be infringed, but the legislature may prescribe the manner in which they may be borne."

GEORGIA. Art. I, Para. 22. "The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed but the General Assembly shall have power to prescribe the manner in which they may be borne."

IDAHO. Art. I, Sec. 11. "The people have the right to bear arms for their security and defense; but the legislatures shall regulate the exercise of that right by law."

ILLINOIS. Nothing.

INDIANA. Art. 1, No. 77. "The people shall have a right to bear arms for the defense of themselves and the State."

IOWA. Nothing.

KANSAS. Bill of Rights, Para. 4. "The people have the right to bear arms for their defense and security; but standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty; and shall not be kept up; and the military shall be in strict subordination to the civil power."

KENTUCKY. Bill of Rights, No. 7. "All men are, by nature, free and equal, and have certain inherent and inalienable rights, among which may be reckoned:

7. The right to bear arms in defense of themselves and the State subject to the power of the general assembly to enact laws to prevent persons from carrying concealed weapons."

LOUISIANA. B. of R., Art. 8. "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be abridged. This shall not prevent the passage of laws to punish those who carry concealed weapons."

MAINE. Art. 1, Sec. 16. "Every citizen has a right to keep and bear arms for the common defense; and this right shall never be questioned."

MARYLAND. Nothing.

MASSACHUSETTS. Dec. of Rights, Art. XVII. "The people have a right to keep and bear arms for the common defense. And as, in time of peace, armies are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be maintained without the consent of the legislature; and the military power shall always be kept in strict subordination to the civil authority and be governed by it."

MICHIGAN. Art. II, Sec. 5. "Every person has a right to bear arms for the defense of himself and the State."

MINNESOTA. Nothing.

MISSISSIPPI. Art. 3, Sec. 12. "The right of every citizen to keep and bear arms in defense of his home, person, or property, or in aid of the civil power when thereto legally summoned, shall not be called into question, but the legislature may regulate or forbid carrying concealed weapons."

MISSOURI. Art. II, Sec. 17. "That the right of no citizen to keep and bear arms in defense of his home, person and property, or in aid of the civil power when thereto legally summoned, shall be called into question; but nothing herein contained is intended to justify the practise of wearing concealed weapons."

MONTANA. Art. III, Sec. 13. "The right of any person to keep or bear arms in defense of his home, person or property or in aid of the civil power when thereto lawfully summoned, shall not be called into question but nothing herein contained shall be held to permit the carrying of concealed weapons."

NEBRASKA. Nothing.

NEVADA. Nothing.

NEW HAMPSHIRE. Nothing.

NEW JERSEY. Nothing.

NEW MEXICO. Art. II, Sec. 6. "The people have the right to bear arms for their security and defense, but nothing herein shall be held to permit the carrying of concealed weapons."

NEW YORK. Nothing in the Constitution. A statutory Bill of Rights contains a clause similar to the Second Amendment.

NORTH CAROLINA. Art. I, Sec. 24. "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; and, as standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be kept up, and the military should be kept in strict subordination to, and governed by, the civil power. Nothing herein contained shall justify the practise of carrying concealed weapons or prevent the legislature from enacting penal statutes against said practise."

NORTH DAKOTA. Nothing.

OHIO. Art. I, No. 4. "The people have the right to bear arms for their defense and security; but standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty; and shall not be kept up; and the military shall be kept in strict subordination to the civil power."

OKLAHOMA. Art. 2, Sec. 26. "The right of a citizen to keep and bear arms in defense of his home, person, or property, or in aid of the civil power when thereunto legally summoned, shall never be prohibited; but nothing herein contained shall prevent the legislature from regulating the carrying of weapons."

OREGON. Art. I, Sec. 27. "The people shall have the right to bear arms for the defense of themselves and the State, but the military shall be kept in strict subordination to the civil power."

PENNSYLVANIA. Art. I, Sec. 21. "The right of the citizens to bear arms in defense of themselves and the State shall not be questioned."

RHODE ISLAND. Art. I, Sec. 22. "The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

SOUTH CAROLINA. Art. I, Sec. 28. "The people have a right to keep and bear arms for the common defense. As in times of peace, armies are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be maintained without the consent of the General Assembly. The military power ought always to be held in an exact subordination to the civil authority and be governed by it."

SOUTH DAKOTA. Art. VI, Sec. 24. "The right of citizens to bear arms in defense of themselves and the State shall not be denied."

TENNESSEE. Art. I, Sec. 26. "That the citizens of this State have a right to keep and bear arms for their common defense; but the legislature shall have power, by law, to regulate the wearing of arms with a view to prevent crime."

TEXAS. Art. I, Sec. 23. "Every citizen shall have the right to keep and bear arms in the lawful defense of himself or the State; but the legislature shall have power, by law, to regulate the wearing of arms with a view to prevent crime."

UTAH. Art. I, Sec. 6. "The people have the right to bear arms for their security and defense, but the Legislature may regulate the exercise of this right by law."

VERMONT. Chap. I, Art. 16. "That the people have a right to bear arms for the defense of themselves and the State—and as standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be kept up; and that the military should be kept under strict subordination to and governed by the civil power."

VIRGINIA. Nothing.

WASHINGTON. Art. I, Sec. 24. "The right of the individual citizen to bear arms in defense of himself or the State shall not be impaired, but nothing in this section shall be construed as authorizing individuals or corporations to organize, maintain, or employ an armed body of men."

WEST VIRGINIA. Nothing.

WISCONSIN. Nothing.

WYOMING. Art. I, Sec. 24. "The right of citizens to bear arms in defense of themselves and of the State shall not be denied."

ONE is impressed by the great diversity of phraseology among the various State Constitutions. But examination shows that many of them have points in common.

Fifteen of them are silent on the question of bearing arms. These are: California, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

The following 16 refer to the right as existing in "The People": United States, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah and Vermont.

These two say "Individual Citizens": Arizona and Washington.

The following 5 use the word "Citizens": Arkansas, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee and Wyoming.

11 States use the word "Citizen" or "Person," with an individual connotation, apparently meaning that the individual may bear arms in his own private defense. They are: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Oklahoma, Texas and Washington.

Georgia and Rhode Island do not specify the purpose for which arms may be borne.

The following 5 say that it is for the "Common Defense": Arkansas, Maine, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Tennessee.

These 5 say that one of the purposes for which arms may be borne is "In Aid of the Civil Power": Colorado, Oklahoma, Missouri, Mississippi and Montana.

5 States say that the purpose is for the people's "Defense and Security." They are: Idaho, Kansas, Ohio, New Mexico and Utah.

These 8 say that the right is to bear arms in defense of "Themselves (*i. e.* the people or citizens) and (sometimes 'or') the State": Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming.

NINE Constitutions, directly or indirectly, discuss the matter of an army or militia in the same clause with which they mention the right to bear arms, thus showing that the two things were linked in the minds of the men who wrote the

Constitutions. But even those which do not mention both subjects in the same clause contain similar references to armies or militia in other parts of their bodies. The 9 Constitutions, above referred to, are: Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, United States and Vermont.

The following 9 expressly except "Concealed Weapons" from the protection of the guaranty: Colorado, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina and Oklahoma.

These 7 expressly give the legislature power to regulate the exercise of the right: Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and Utah.

2 States expressly except private armies from protection. They are: Arizona and Washington.

Although it is commonly said that the "Right to Keep and Bear Arms" is not created by Constitutions but that its infringement is prohibited, it would appear that the following 18 Constitutions are broad enough to create such a right even if it had not existed prior to their adoption: Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Vermont.

THE foregoing shows an analysis of the similarities between the various Constitutional Provisions upon the subject at issue. But no one can really understand this subject without examining the decisions of the various courts of last resort, Federal and State. Just as the Supreme Court of the United States has the ultimate power of interpreting the Constitution of the United States, so have the State Supreme Courts similar power in regard to their respective Constitutions.

Any one will see how unreasonable it would be to expect uniformity of interpretation among the various States. Many of the Constitutions are at variance with each other. Contrast the Constitution of New York, which places no restriction upon the power of its legislature, with that of Michigan, which says: "Every person has a right to bear arms for the defense of himself and the State." No one would imagine that both Constitutions mean the same thing, and their difference in meaning is bound to be reflected in the decisions of the respective courts.

FOR purpose of elimination, let us first take those States in which no constitutional reference to the keeping or bearing of arms exists. Strange as it must seem to some of the opponents of the Sullivan Pistol Law, New York is one of those States. True, New York has a statutory Bill of Rights which embodies the same wording as the Second Amendment. But this Bill of Rights was enacted only by the Legislature. It is similar in its scope to the English Bill of Rights, being merely an advisory piece of lawmaking, without power to curtail the authority of the body which created it. A later Contradictory statute, being of equal dignity, will supersede the former one. The absence of a written Constitution, superior to the statute-making body, is the reason for the well-known omnipotence of the British Parliament.

The validity of the Sullivan Law seems to have been expressly affirmed in the cases of People *v.* Warden, (1913, 139 N. Y. Supp. 277), and People *v.* Persce, (1912, 204, N. Y. 397), although these decisions hardly seem to realize the true situation, namely, that the New York Legislature has no restrictions at all upon its power to pass laws regarding firearms, except, perhaps, that of not rendering its citizens incapable of performing their duty to the Federal Government. But this applies only to the power of the Federal Government under Section VIII of the United States Constitution, of which more later. It has no reference to the Second Amendment.

IN A very recent California case, (*Ex Parte* Ramirez, decided May 29, 1924, 226 Pac. 914), the Court recognized the true doctrine that "the absence of such a guarantee (*i. e.* of the right to bear arms) in the State Constitution, leaves the legislature entirely free to deal with the subject."

In the famous case of Presser *v.* Illinois, (1885, 116 U. S. 252), in which the Supreme Court of the United States upheld the right of Illinois to forbid the parading of unauthorized bodies of armed men, the Court properly rejected the argument that the Second Amendment was violated. And Illinois has no similar clause in its own Constitution.

In the recent New Hampshire case of State *v.* Rheaume, (1922, 80 N. H. 319), no argument was even made upon the right to bear arms. Evidently, it was realized by counsel that the Second Amendment did not apply and New Hampshire's Constitution contains no similar guaranty.

ADMITTING that the Second Amendment applies only to Congress, what does it forbid Congress to do? That is a question as yet unanswered. If the Federal law restricting interstate commerce in firearms be passed, the Supreme Court of the United States may have to give a more detailed interpretation of the Second Amendment than it has as yet produced. But judging from the prevailing trend of the cases, it would seem as if the Second Amendment only forbids Congress so to disarm the citizens as to prevent them from functioning as State militiamen. Under Section VIII of the United States Constitution, the Federal Government exercises a paramount control over, but may not destroy, the militia of the States; the latter may legislate concurrently, provided they do not contradict the enactments of Congress. (Presser *v.* Illinois, 1885, 116 U. S. 252; Dunne *v.* People, 1879, 94 Ill. 120; Houston *v.* Moore, 5 Wheat., 1; People *v.* Warden, 1913, 139 N. Y. Supp. 277.)

THE next problem is the power of the State legislatures under their own Constitutions. It is conceded that no American Constitution robs its State of the State's general power to regulate the welfare of its citizens, protect the public peace, etc. In other words, the constitutional clause, if any, must be read in the light of the general "police power" of the State. The "police power" may or may not be curtailed thereby. But it is not completely destroyed. It still exists, in some degree. (Strickland *v.* State, 1911, 137 Ga. 1; Andrews *v.* State, 1871, Tenn. 3 Heisk. 165; State *v.* Reid, 1840, 1 Ala. 612.)

There are certain forms of regulation so proper and necessary that they are universally conceded. The most noticeable of these is the restriction of the carrying of concealed weapons. Indeed, many of the Constitutions expressly say that the guaranty does not cover concealed weapons, but even in the absence of express provision, it has been universally held that such a pernicious practise may be forbidden. There is only one old Kentucky case to the contrary, (Bliss *v.* Com., 2 Litt. 90), and this was followed by amending the Kentucky constitutional provision so as to allow the Legislature to pass the suitable laws. Other similar laws, which are not seriously questioned, are those pointing weapons at people, against going armed to church, court, polling-place, etc., against the possession of arms by tramps, minors, convicts, insane or intoxicated persons, against shooting within the city limits, etc. (Concealed weapons. Com. *v.* Murphy, 1896, 166 Mass. 171; State *v.* Gohl, 1907, 46 Wash. 408; Hill *v.* State, 1874, 53 Ga. 472; Nunn *v.* State, 1846, 1 Ga. 243; State *v.* Jumel, 1858, 13 La. Ann. 399; State *v.* Kerner, 1921, N. C. 107 S. E. 222; State *v.* Keet, 1916, Mo. 190 S. W. 573; State *v.* Reid, 1840, 1 Ala. 612; State *v.* Boone, 1903, 132 N. C. 1107; Wright *v.* Com., 1875, 77 Pa. St. 470; Orrick *v.* Akers, 1904, 109 Mo. App. 662; Haile *v.* State, 1882, 38 Ark. 564; State *v.* Nieto, 1920, 101 O. S. 409. *Against other nuisances.* Hogan *v.* State, 1900, 63 O. S. 202; Hill *v.* State, 1874, 53 Ga. 472; State *v.* Kerner, 1921, N. C., 107 S. E. 222; Coleman *v.* State, 1858, 32 Ala. 581; State *v.* Shelby, 1886, 90 Mo. 302; Davenport *v.* State, 1895, 112 Ala. 49; State *v.* Johnson, 1906, 76 S. C. 39; Walter *v.* State, 1905, 35 Ohio C. C. 576.)

IT IS usually said that the only kind of weapons meant by the word "Arms" in the Constitutions is the type of weapon suitable for use in civilized warfare. That means that sword-canes, loaded canes, slung-shots, dirks, bowie-knives, Arkansas tooth-picks (Hugh Pendexter take notice! These seem to have been very popular fifty or sixty years ago, to judge from the Statutes against them.), pocket-pistols, etc., do not come under the ægis of the guaranty. Only such weapons as swords, bayonets, muskets, horseman's pistols, field pieces, mortars, etc., were intended to be protected. There are a few exceptions among the decisions, but these will be discussed later. (Dabbs *v.* State, 1882, 39 Ark. 355; Fife *v.* State, 1876, 31 Ark. 633; State *v.* Wilburn, 1872, 66 Tenn. 57; Aymette *v.* State, Tenn, 2 Humph. 154; Andrews *v.* State, 1871, Tenn., 2 Heisk. 165; Hill *v.* State, 1874, 53 Ga. 472; *Ex parte* Thomas, 1908, 21 Okla. 770.)

When a Court says that only weapons suitable for warfare are protected, it is a fair inference that the Court means that citizens are to carry those weapons as actual or potential members of the State militia. Some Courts expressly ennunciate this rule. (Strickland *v.* State, 1911, 137 Ga. 1; People *v.* Warden, 1913, 139 N. Y. Supp. 277; Salina *v,* Blacksley, 1905, 72 Kan. 230; State *v.* Hogan, 1900 63 O. S. 202; Andrews *v.* State, 1871, 3 Heisk. 165.) Other Courts, though not so definite in their words, seem to mean the same thing when they say that the guaranty protects the people against aggression, oppression, etc., since that seems to connote the citizenry acting as a unit in defense of its liberties.

(Haile *v.* State, 1882, 38 Ark. 564; Carlton *v.* State, 1912, 63 Fla. 1; Walter *v.* State, 1905, 35 Ohio C. C. 567; Smith *v.* Isenhour, 1866, 43 Tenn. [3 Could.] 214.)

THE leading Kansas case of Salina *v.* Blacksley, referred to above, goes so far as expressly to decide that the word "people" means only the collective body and that individual rights are not protected by the Constitutional provision. The only time people are protected, according to this case, is when they are acting under the express authority of the State, as members of a military organization. According to the language of the opinion, "In some of the States, where it has been held, under similar provisions, that the citizen has the right to carry such arms as are ordinarily used in civilized warfare, it is placed on the ground that it was intended that the people would thereby become accustomed to handling and using such arms, so that in case of an emergency, they would be more or less prepared for the duties of a soldier. The weakness of this argument lies in the fact that in nearly every State in the Union, there are provisions for organizing and drilling State militia in sufficient numbers to meet any such emergency." This case said that the carrying even of *un*concealed might be forbidden. But this last point is by no means clear from the decisions. (Nunn *v.* State, 1846, 1 Ga. 243; State *v.* Duke, 1875, 42 Tex. 455; Isaiah *v.* State, 1912, 176 Ala. 27.)

A number of provisions say that the guaranty is to enable a man to defend his person, property, etc. Under our theory of law, clearly a right exists. The only difficulty is to say how far the States may restrict him in the choice of dangerous weapons for the enforcement of his right. Some cases, it will be seen later, go quite far in allowing the use of firearms. But they are in the minority. (People *v.* Zerillo, 1922, 219 Mich. 635, etc.)

Whether or not a man is entitled to have firearms for self-defense, he has no protection if he becomes the aggressor. (State *v.* White, 1923, Mo., 253 S. W. 724; State *v.* Hogan, 1900, 63 O. S. 202.) In Carlton *v.* State, (1912, 63 Fla. 1,) the Court, in pithy and forceful language, said that the guaranty in the Florida Constitution "was intended to give people means of protecting themselves against oppression and outrage and was not designed as a shield for the individual man who is prone to load his stomach with liquor and his pockets with revolvers or dynamite and make of himself a dangerous nuisance to society."

THERE are a few decisions to which reference was made in the paragraph before last which, for want of a better adjective, can be called "Liberal" cases. They are "Liberal" in the sense that they do not try to whittle down the rights of the individual citizen.

Thus, the case of Wilson *v.* State, (1878, 33 Ark. 557), after admitting that certain necessary restrictions may be imposed, said:

"But to prohibit the citizen from wearing or carrying a war weapon, except on his own premises, or when on a journey traveling through the country with baggage, or when acting as, or in aid of, an officer, is an unwarranted restriction upon his constitutional right to keep and bear arms."

A Texas case, decided in the same year, Jennings *v.* State, (5 Tex. App. 298), said that the legislature could not cause a person convicted of carrying arms illegally to forfeit them. "One of his most sacred rights is that of having arms for his own defense and that of the State."

The well-known Texas case of State *v.* Duke, (1875, 42 Tex. 455), went so far as to say that the Texas Constitution did not necessarily contemplate only the formation of "a well-regulated militia" and that "the arms which every person is secured the right to keep and bear (in the defense of himself or the State, subject to legislative regulation) must be such arms as are commonly kept according to the customs of the people and are appropriate for open and manly use in self-defense, as well as such as are proper for the defense of the State. If this does not include the double-barrelled shot-gun, the huntsman's rifle, and such pistols at least as are not adapted to being carried concealed, then the only arms which the great mass of the people of the State have are not under constitutional protection."

But one must contrast with this case the much later one of Caswell *et al.* *v.* State, (1912, Tex. Civ. App., 148 S. W. 1159), in which the court intimated that the selling of firearms had a baneful influence and might be taxed out of existence. This shows how a frontier point of view may change to an urban one.

THE North Carolina case of State *v.* Kerner, (1921, 107 S. E. 222), shows a court taking a common-sense view of the militia criterion. Chief Justice Clark said, in reference to the State Constitution, that although the legislature could reasonably regulate the carrying of arms, it had to respect the customary weapons which people had possessed when the Constitution had been adopted. "It is true," said the Chief Justice, "that the invention of guns with a carrying range of probably 100 miles, submarines, deadly gases, and of airplanes carrying bombs and other modern devices, have much reduced the importance of the pistol in warfare except at close range. But the ordinary private citizen, whose right to carry arms can not be infringed upon, is not likely to purchase these expensive and most modern devices just named. To him the rifle, the musket, the shot-gun and the pistol are about the only arms which he could be expected to 'bear,' and his right to do this is that which is guaranteed by the Constitution. To deprive him of bearing any of these arms is to infringe upon the right guaranteed to him by the Constitution."

THE Michigan case of People *v.* Zerillo, (1922, 219 Mich. 635), stated that aliens as well as citizens had a right, under the Michigan Constitution, to possess firearms, whether revolver, rifle or shotgun, for the defense of themselves and their property. The court distinguished this case from the Pennsylvania case of Commonwealth *v.* Patsone, (1911, 231 Pa. 46; affirmed by the Supreme Court of the U. S., 232 U. S. 138), which involved the Pennsylvania law against the possession of weapons by aliens. The Pennsylvania Constitution only protected the right of "citizens" and the statute under examination only forbade aliens to have long-range weapons, not interfering with their possession of short range arms, such as revolvers and pistols. The Pennsylvania case is not quoted here because nothing was said about the Second Amendment or what corresponded to it in the State Constitution. Other objections were raised by counsel but this one was ignored.

In the Michigan case, Judge Wiest said, half humorously:

"Must an alien owner of a farm sit with folded arms and watch hen-hawks steal his chickens? No; the act permits him to kill noxious birds and animals, when necessary, in defense of his person or property. But what is he going to use for that purpose? Until the occasion arises, if this statute is given the construction contended for by the people, it is a crime for him to possess a firearm, and he therefore can not be prepared to exercise the leave granted without committing a crime. Woodchucks could burrow in his yards and meadows with impunity, owls rob his henroost, rats run about his feet at chore time, and in some sections of the State wolves could sit on his very doorstep and howl defiance. Even the predatory skunk, in the open season, would be more offensively armed than the unnaturalized farmer faring forth to drive it away. Must such a farmer whistle off the dog discovered in the act of killing his sheep? Another statute gives him the right to kill such a dog discovered in the act. Must he request the burglar to come unarmed because he has been unarmed by the law? This act, if construed as contended for by the people, is so sharp shod as to calk itsels. The right to kill noxious birds and animals in defense of person or property would be but a joke if the means of exercising the right are taken away by the general prohibition against possessing any firearms."

MOST of the cases we have cited have touched upon various legal questions. We have limited this discussion, however, to the single right "To Keep and Bear Arms." By way of explanation, one or two other points should be added, without elaborating upon them. In the case of Miller *v.* Texas, (1893, 153 U. S. 535), the Supreme Court of the United States upheld a Texas law which forbade the carrying of dangerous weapons on the person. The Supreme Court said that this law did not violate the Second Amendment, of course, and also that it did not deprive any one of due process of law or abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States, according to the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments.

The comparatively recent case of State *v.* Nieto, (1920, Ohio, 101 O. S. 409), said that a man might violate the Ohio law against carrying concealed weapons by carrying a revolver in his pocket within a bunkhouse where he was living, and that the popular maxim, "A man's house is his castle," had no bearing.

THERE is great room for speculation as to the future law upon the questions raised by the Second Amendment. Let us assume that the constitutional guaranty refers to the preparedness of citizens to take their place in the militia. As the court pointed out in State *v.* Kerner, the fashions in war weapons have undergone great change. We no longer have the simple equipment of swords, horseman's pistols, bayonets, muskets, etc., which were once customary. (Hill *v.* State, 1874, 53 Ga. 472.)

As early as 1871, Judge Freeman, in Andrews *v.* State, (3 Heisk. 165), said:

"We may for a moment pause to reflect on the fact that what was once deemed a stable and essential bulwark of freedom, 'a well-regulated militia,' though the clause still remains in our Constitutions, both State and Federal, has, as an organization, passed away in almost every State of the Union, and only remains to us as a memory of the past, probably never to be revived."

Judge Freeman was speaking of the Tennessee of the early seventies, which was just emerging from the terrible aftermath of the Civil War. We do know that "well-regulated militia" organizations do exist and that they probably are more efficient today than at any period in the past. But whether they may be considered "a stable and essential bulwark of freedom," any more so than the Regular Army of the United States, may be doubted. In this respect, at least, Judge Freeman was correct, for we know that in time of stress the State militia has a tendency to submerge its identity into the national unit.

Judge Green, in Salina *v.* Blacksley, (1905, 72 Kan. 230), echoed a similar thought when he pointed out that no longer do the States rely upon raw levies to turn out over night in case of an emergency, but carefully organize and drill their militia.

IN OTHER words, the day of the frontiersman, who leaped to the defense of his town or State when the savages raised their howl, is past. The modern soldier, whether he be militiaman or regular, is a cog in a well-drilled, smoothly running machine. He is not expected to develop his natural ability by unorthodox means. He falls into line and obeys his officers. The spirit of the free-lance pioneer was all right in its day but now would be incompatible with military discipline.

Fashions in war change. The kind of weapons which the fathers of the nation knew may become obsolete within the century, like cross-bows, fauchards, misericordes or morgensterns. Indeed, at one time during the middle-ages, cross-bows were condemned by the Church as inhumane. Yet they later became recognized implements of warfare and then passed out of the picture. Have we any reason to assume that gunpowder will never share the same fate? If this happens, will the constitutional guaranty be broad enough to cover the new weapons as they become common and to leave the present ones unprotected as they become obsolete? Or will courts say that the States may have their well-regulated militia even though individuals possess no weapons of their own, provided the State is willing and able to supply the necessary weapons upon mobilization?

ANOTHER question is whether future lawyers and judges will recognize that there is a right to keep and bear arms. We must remember that in such instances in which they have discussed the matter at all, the courts have said that Constitutions do not create the right. They only say that whatever it may be, it is to be protected against infringement. Conceivably, there may be no right to keep and bear arms in the first place. The Constitutions say that no man shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law. But they do not create these things. If a man has property, it is protected. If he is a pauper, he has nothing to protect. We must first look outside the Constitution to see whether he owns any property.

Now the right to keep and bear arms, as understood by the early constitutional lawyers, was based upon the "Rights of Man" theory of the 18th century French philosophers. Except for political and emotional purposes, during campaign speeches, addresses to juries, and Fourth of July orations, this theory is as dead as the men who fashioned it. It may or may not have been correct. That is not the question. The point is that it has served its purpose in the world of thought and has passed away, except to the extent that it has been embalmed in our constitutional law. Whether it was true or false, it is no longer seriously held by the highly trained legal specialists of our large universities, who, even more than the courts, are the molders of legal opinion. Lawyers and judges, whether they realize it or not, carry into their later years the methods of thinking acquired at college. The prevailing view now seems to be that there are no abstract rights of any kind but only the conflicting interests of various kinds of persons. These interests clash and reach a balance, which is law. The writer does not subscribe to this theory, but that is immaterial. Its importance and prevalence can not be denied. Of course, some learned lawyers and judges will hold the older theory on valid philosophical grounds. The great majority will cling to it blindly, because it is more emotional and offers more possibilities for the orator and demagogue. But the writer believes that it will never exercise the same influence upon public matters which it did in the period prior to the twentieth century.

Now here is the big question:

Will the courts ever say that the Constitutions would protect the right to keep and bear arms, if there was such a right, but that it does not exist and never did exist except in the minds of discredited theorists?

IN CONCLUSION, let us remember that, except on two points, it is impossible to dogmatize. These points are:

1. That the States which have no clause similar to the Second Amendment have practically unlimited authority to legislate concerning arms.
2. That the practise of carrying concealed weapons is nowhere protected.

In 23 States, there seem to be no important decisions upon the matter at all. When, if ever, their courts must pass upon the question, they probably will adopt the militia criterion in most instances, to the exclusion of the individual's right, just as most of the existing cases have been decided.

This does not give much encouragement to opponents of anti-weapon legislation, of whom the writer is one. But facts must be faced and it seems that our efforts should be directed not so much toward trying to have such statutes declared unconstitutional, as toward convincing legislators not to pass such statutes in the first place.

Now let us hear from any lawyers among us who can shed new light upon the matter.

The above brings us face to face with bigger things than the anti-weapon question, who shape our national destinies? The people as a whole? Only to a degree. The men they elect to public office? Only to a degree. Who really shape it? The money interests largely, working through many and diverse agents who are consciously or unconsciously their tools. Mr. McKenna says that the highly trained legal specialists of our large universities, even more than the courts, are the molders of legal opinion. And that they are teaching the doctrine that there are no abstract rights of any kind!

No wonder our liberties are being gradually taken from us! It seems we have no right to any liberty.

And this has been going on for years, gradually undermining the very foundations of liberty in this "land of the free." A pretty teaching, in perfect accordance with economic determinism. And beyond doubt the advocates of economic determinism are responsible for this teaching.

Economic determinism is by its very nature incompatible with personal rights and freedom. It blots from the world even the consideration of morals as a factor in human affairs. Christianity, or any other religion? If a man claims he is both a Christian and an economic determinist he is either stupid or a liar.

A democracy or a republic, then, is a mere market, a collection of hucksters.

That, it seems, is what is being taught into the very fabric of our civilization.

I'm no lawyer, but do these interpreters of our Constitution according to the principles of economic determinism allow any consideration to the fact that the Constitution was not written by economic determinists and that the present-day interpretation of it is therefore flatly contrary to the spirit and intent of that document? Is not their interpretation, therefore, something of an *ex post facto* proceeding?

Just what is their right and authority for making, by any interpretation, a "scrap of paper" out of the fundamental law intended by its makers and endorsers to be superior to the opinions of any minority, even a minority of lawyers?

You may quote law at me till you're weary and I'll still say to you that if the law specialists are able to take from the people a legal protection and guarantee the people won for themselves, thought they had, and desire to have, then there is something vastly wrong with the conditions that make it possible for them to do so.

Laws are but the expression of the people's will. If they make or ratify a law which they intend to mean A and which clearly states their meaning and intent, no lawyers have the right to suddenly change it to mean B, which is something quite different from what the people meant when they made the law and something most of them had never even heard of.

In other words, which is superior—law or lawyers?

If a people draft and ratify a Constitution guaranteeing what they consider inherent rights of the individual (and in a proceeding Declaration term "inalienable" rights), are lawyers at a later date to sweep it aside by calmly saying that it can't mean what the people meant it to mean and endorsed it as meaning? Are they to sweep it autocratically into the discard for the grand reason that their own theories do not happen to agree with the theories of those who made it? Such perversion is neither democracy nor common sense nor honesty.

If *that* is conservatism and stability and precedent, then give me the Reds as offering something more dependable, more logical and more honest by comparison. The Reds may be noisier and rougher, but they're not so subversive of the principles upon which we've existed in theory longer than any other existing government.—A. S. H.

YES, probably a good many around Camp-Fire can cite instances when wanderers have been fined, not for their sins, but for the benefit of some other fellow's pocket. A word from Raymond S. Spears in connection with his story in this issue:

Inglewood, California.

"Fines and Fees" is the story of a hiker down into the Southwest. I used to see wanderers handled that way—remember two boys, especially, who were searched and, when their $12.14 was found by the police, were fined $10 to help the city recorder pile up a big record. This yarn far from that scene, but it's a right common practise at that.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid,* the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in next issue.*)

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *aud occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: July 30, 1922 issue. State your price.—Address Frank J. Curran, 16 Pomander Walk, New York City.

WILL BUY: August 3, 1920 issue. Who can supply it?—Address H. S. Auerbach, Auerbach Company, Salt Lake City, Utah.

WILL SELL: All issues from December 1917 to date. 130 numbers; excellent condition; covers intact. Make me an offer.—Address Lester Aumic, P. O. Carrier No. 41, Schenectady, New York.

WILL SELL: Complete file from October 1913 to March 30, 1925.—Address John H. Mackey, 31 East Ashley Street, Jacksonville, Florida.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4—6. Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts
7, 8. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
9. Australia and Tasmania
10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
11. New Guinea
12, 13. Philippine and Hawaiian Islands
13—18. Asia. In Five Parts
19—26. Africa. In Eight Parts
27, 28. Turkey and Asia Minor
29—34. Europe. In Six Parts
35—37. South America. In Three Parts
38. Central America
39—41. Mexico. In Three Parts
42—50. Canada. In Nine Parts
51. Alaska
52. Baffinland and Greenland
53—58. Western U. S. In Six Parts
59—63. Middle Western U. S. In Five Parts
64—73. Eastern U. S. In Ten Parts
A. Radio
B. Mining and Prospecting
C. Old Songs That Men Have Sung
D1—3. Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
E. Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
F, G. Forestry in the U. S. and Tropical Forestry
H—J. Aviation, Army and Navy Matters
K. American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
L. First Aid on the Trail
M. Health-Building Outdoors
N. Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada
O. P. Herpetology and Entomology
Standing Information

The Canary Islands

A BOUNTIFUL land where living is still cheap outside of the ports:

Request:—"I am interested in the Canary Islands and I would like to have the following information:

1. What are the principal ports?
2. What is the main trade on the islands?
3. What people inhabit the islands?
4. Could I go direct to the Canarys from here or would I have to change ships at some port?
5. Is it possible to get to the Canarys from Madeira?
6. Is it possible to live off of the land on these islands?

Any other information that you can give me will be greatly appreciated.

If this should be published please do not use my name."— ——

Reply, by Capt. Dingle:—1. Chief ports are Las Palmas, Santa Cruz, Porto Gando, Orotava, Arrecife, Porto Cabras.

2. Principal trade is in wine, liquors, vegetables, bananas, tobacco, cochineal and exquisite drawn-thread fabric work.

3. Population is Spanish, but not of clear strain, almost all the natives being more or less mingled with the original native strain, which has vanished, but which was almost certainly northern African in origin.

4. Getting there direct depends upon whether you could get to know of some freighter calling there. I know of no direct line from the United States. The Fabre Line steamers from Brooklyn call at the Azores and Madeira, however, and it is easy to get to Canary from those places. Other ships calling either at Azores or Madeira or both are, Lloyd Sabauda, Italian General Navigation Co., White Star Line, from Boston. The two Italian Lines sail from New York.

5. Yes. Inter-Island craft or British steamers that call en route to Australia by way of the Cape of Good Hope.

6. The land is very fruitful, and fruit, vegetables and grain can be grown profusely. There are plenty of fish and game to be had for the getting, and living is still cheap outside of the ports.

Apply to the American Consul, Santa Cruz, Teneriffe for data on lands.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do NOT write to the magazine itself.

Missouri River Boats

HERE'S some general information about the old side-wheelers:

Request:—"I am trying to get information concerning the river steamers which navigated to the headwaters of some of our Montana rivers. If you have no information specifically covering steamers that operated on these waters then please answer the following questions in the light of your knowledge of Mississippi riverboats with a maximum capacity of 300 tons of freight and 100 passengers. The period in which I am interested lies between 1970 and 1880.

1. Approximate length, beam and draft when loaded of a boat with capacity as above.
2. H. P. of engine. Were these boats equipped with more than one engine, as a rule?
3. Were the engines connected to the paddle with a walking beam? How many r. p. m. would a rear paddle make?
4. How many boilers? Was there any particular reason for the almost universal twin stacks?
5. Did the exhaust go into a smokestack or up a separate pipe on the outside of the stack, or where?
6. Were these boats very noisy because of the exhaust, paddle, or machinery?
7. How many men were needed to operate a boat of this size?
8. Did these steamers carry any small boats?

If these questions are out of your territory can you tell me where I can find answers to my questions?"—ROBERT T. POUND, Lavina, Mont.

Reply, by Mr. Zerr:—The following boats were built for the Missouri River trade:

1870. Steamboat *R. J. Lockwood*, 195 feet long, 33 foot beam, carried 300 tons. *Mollie Moore*, 200 foot long, about 500 tons, with one stack. *Oceanus*, no data as to her dimensions and capacity.

1871. Steamers *Katie P. Kountz*, *Esperanza*, *E. H. Durfee*, *May Lowry*, *Nellie Peck*, *Lady Lee*, *Big Foot*. No data on dimensions.

1877. Steamers *Rose Bud*, *Black Hills*, 192 feet long, 32 feet beam; engines, 13-inch diameter, 5-foot stroke; *Big Horn*, *General Custis*, *F. Y. Batchelor*, *Helena*.

1878. *Eclipse*, *General Terry*, *General Rischer*, *General Tomkins*. These boats had maximum capacity of 250 to 300 tons.

1879. *Montana*, *Dakota*, *Carrier*, *Wyoming;* these largest boats carried from 500 to 700 tons up the Missouri River. *Montana* and *Dakota* were about 48-foot beam; these large boats on the lower Missouri had a capacity of 800 to 900 tons.

The best low-water boat ever on the upper Missouri River was the *Butte*, 34-foot beam, 195 feet long, having two boilers, and 13-inch diameter and five-foot stroke engines; carried from 250 to 300 tons and was kept on the upper river by the Powers Line due to her light draft.

Question 1. Answered above.

2. Generally two high pressure engines, one on the starboard and one on the port side, with from 200 to 600 horse-power.

3. These boats were of the stern-wheel type, with a radial paddle wheel located at the stern, the shafts supported by beams extending aft of the stern of the boat. The wheel, shaft, and cranks were connected to the engine by connecting rods, varying in length from 20 to 35 feet as conditions required, making an average of 24 revolutions per minute.

4. There were usually two boilers, externally fired, with two flues in each boiler. Twin stacks as a general rule have been used for several reasons, namely draft, and then one chimney in the center interferes with the pilot's view, although there have

been boats on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers with one stack—also at present on the Ohio River, called among river men "One Armed John"—which were objected to by pilots.

5. The exhaust was on the stack, although all boats arranged the exhausts at will of the engineer. The exhaust from high pressure engines is carried off into a heater, for heating the water to a high degree before going to the boilers, and the exhaust from the heater is carried off into the stack to produce a forced draft. At times it is exhausted overboard into the air. This is done only when the steam pressure gets too high. There is some noise from the exhaust both in stacks and overboard.

6. The exhaust is like music to the engineer, he can tell by its sound whether everything was running smoothly. The paddle wheel produces a small amount of vibration, which generally is not noticed by the traveler, and is really a sleep producer.

7. It required about twenty men to operate one of these boats: one captain, two pilots, two engineers, two firemen, one mate, one watchman, one carpenter, ten deckhands, two cooks, one steward.

8. These boats were furnished with an outfit as required by the Government inspectors, usually two small boats, life preservers and life floats. Generally an extra skiff, or yawl was carried for the convenience of the pilot, who was compelled to get out and inspect the channel, as the Missouri carries a great amount of sand and the channel shifts. The large number of rapids in that stream increases the current from five to eight miles per hour.

I hope I have answered them all to your satisfaction, but if you want more information just send another letter and I will try and come across.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Trapping in Northern Keewatin

WHERE white foxes are:

Request:—"I am thinking about taking a trapping trip into northern Keewatin, so I would appreciate any information you can give me on the country. Here are my questions:

What size boat would be necessary to travel along the shore in Hudson Bay?

What part of Keewatin would you consider the best place to go trapping white foxes?

Are there many white men or Eskimos in the country?

What number of white foxes would be considered a fair catch in that country?

Could a person depend upon driftwood for fuel?

Do you consider northern Keewatin a good white fox country?

Would it be wise to depend upon caribou for meat?"—W. L. Elliott, Mountain Park, Alta, Canada.

Reply, by Mr. Hague:—To outfit for a trip such as you propose would probably cost a couple of thousand dollars; that is, if you intended to do things right and not get stuck. It would be a hazardous trip, and as white foxes move around quite a bit you might have difficulty in making good.

If you intend to skirt around the Hudson Bay the best way is to leave The Pas by train to Mile 214, H. B. Railway—train leaves twice a month. From 214 you would have to travel a distance by gas car and then get to Port Nelson by canoe. From there take H. B. Co. boat around to Churchill. It takes a big boat to follow around that coast.

Once you get up around Chesterfield, if you go that far, there is no fuel at all and oil burners have to be carried. You can imagine how much oil is worth up there. Lots of caribou roving in bands, but the trouble is to come across them. However, they are the staple diet. There are a few white men at the posts around the bay and Eskimos at Chesterfield Inlet and other points. I would advise you to think long and hard before you undertake this trip as it is a hazardous one with chances of making good very much against you.

Snake Charming

IT'S not the music that fascinates the cobra, but the gaudily painted flute:

Request:—"Would you be good enough to give me some information on the subject of Oriental snake-charmers?

A friend of mine, who is supposed to have some knowledge on the subject, insists that the cobras with which these men perform have had their fangs extracted.

On the other hand, I, myself, while traveling recently in the East, have been assured by more than one such charmer, that his snakes were fully capable of killing a man on the spot.

Of course, I realize that he may have been 'spoofing' me, as my English acquaintances used to say. But those same English residents, who surely ought to have known, were very careful not to go too close to the snakes.

I wish, therefore, you would give me your opinion on the matter and settle the argument. My friend says that he will be willing to abide by the decision of an 'A. A.' expert, and to settle our little bet accordingly."—George E. Schultz, Johnstown, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. MacCreagh:—How big was your bet? Because you've lost it. Your friend is right. I qualify that statement by adding—in my opinion. For I am no man to claim that I know everything that an Oriental may or may not do. It does happen, however, that I have had considerable dealings with just those people in whom you are interested. I have traveled with snake charmers, even eaten with them, which doesn't often happen to a white man; and I have purchased from them well over a hundred cobras for shipment to various zoological societies.

I venture to state, therefore—while admitting that any statement about an Oriental is a risk—that, without exception, the snakes which are used for performances have been "fixed."

To begin with, all snake "charming" is pure hokum. This is a wide statement which may call forth a heap of argument. But let me here restrict myself to cobras.

What you have seen, of course, is that a snake charmer slams down a little, round wicker basket and snatches off the cover, while in the same instant he uses his left hand to begin playing his double-reed pipe which is stuck into a gaudily painted gourd. The snake immediately rears up with expanded hood and follows the swaying pipe with "fascinated" attention, charmed into a sweet temper by the music.

Bunk. That snake is just as mad as he can be. Why should he not? He has been slammed down hard and considerably jolted. The cover of his dark basket has been snatched off and he finds himself suddenly in the blazing sunlight. Naturally he rises in the defensive position. It so happens that the defensive position with all the cobras is that peculiarly showy stance with the forward third of the body raised and the hood expanded. That is why the snake charmers "charm" cobras.

The snake is good and mad, and ready to strike at any suspicious object. The most disconcerting object within the range of its immediate vision is the brightly painted gourd of the pipe. So it follows that with malignant suspicion as the "charmer" sways back and forth and round and about. Sometimes, if the pipe comes within striking distance, the snake will strike viciously at it—as you may have seen yourself.

It is pure defensive suspicion that causes the snake to follow the pipe so attentively. Experiments have shown that snakes are utterly unresponsive to music—as *music*. It is possible, in fact, probable, that a cobra can sense the droning *vibrations* of the pipe through the nerves situated in its expanded hood. But that these vibrations are in any way pleasing to it is highly improbable, and has certainly never been proven. It has been amply proven, on the other hand, that it is suspicion and anger which cause the snake to follow the disturbing *gourd*, not the music.

Now, as to poison. As I have said, I have purchased and handled some hundred or more cobras; and I venture the unhesitating statement that every snake used for performance has been "fixed." Snake charmers occasionally do have in their possession snakes whose fangs have not been removed. Generally these are awaiting a convenient time for operation. Sometimes certain of the men have a clientele to whom they sell these deadly ones—the tale is that their customers are mostly jealous women. But "performers" are without exception harmless.

THE method of removal of the fangs is far more drastic than is generally imagined. One hears foolish stories of inserting a knife blade and breaking them off. Rubbish. A cobra—like all poison snakes, for that matter—has replacable fangs. The pair in use are extended and fixed in position, as with all the colubrines. But behind these, under the gum, is a series of nearly developed fangs, lying back overlapping one another. And as soon as a pair of fangs, or a single fang, gets broken—which is a very usual circumstance in the ordinary pursuit of the reptile's food—the next fang in line commences to break through the gum and take the place of the lost one. This condition of temporary innocuity is the explanation of many of the stories of marvelous recoveries after being undoubtedly bitten. There are other causes, of course, of immunity; such as health of the snake, previous emptying of the poison sac, and so on; but fanglessness may be accepted as the explanation of some fifty per cent. of the fortunate escapes from death.

Owing again to the health of the snake, the actual time of replacement of a fang is uncertain. But a healthy snake will be in a condition to do business within from three to four weeks.

So snake charmers take no chances; but operate very thoroughly on a snake which they intend to use for performance. The process, as I said is drastic; but it is the only safe method. The snake is held down by one man while another, the expert surgeon, excises the whole upper maxillary bone containing the embryo fangs. I *have* seen a man hold a snake down between his bare toes and operate thus alone. But that isn't usual; for a snake has an astonishing strength and elusiveness when it really wants to wriggle.

Some two out of every three snakes do not survive the operation, which explains the price of "fixed" cobras. Even among snake men, as among surgeons, there are some who have a reputation for successful performance; and the less expert charmers go to these high priced operators to have their snakes attended to. There used to be a man who lived in the Howrah section of Calcutta who had quite a reputation as an expert dentist, and he did a thriving business. Two rupees, live or die, was his fee. One of those zero jobs, I'd call it.

Sorry you've lost your bet. But the thing for you to do now is to go out with this information and bet somebody else. You ought to be able to start an argument on some of the points I've given you.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Panama

TEN million acres of excellent sugar land awaiting development:

Request:—"I am thinking of emigrating to Panama, but before going I would like to have some reliable and impartial information about the country.

Is there any obstacle placed in the way of white immigration from the United States? Would a man who is willing to rough it and who is not a stranger to conditions in the tropics, having lived four years in the Philippine Islands, stand any chance of obtaining employment there? What are the names of some firms who employ Americans there? Is it necessary to have any kind of a pass in order to go to and from the Canal Zone from Panama?

Do you think one's chances of obtaining outdoor employment are as good there as elsewhere? Are any white men other than technical experts employed by the railroads? What is the predominating language? Are there any natives of Panama similar to those found in the islands of the Pacific Ocean, or are they more like the Mexican?

Thank you in advance for this and any other information you may care to give in regard to Panama."—DOUGLAS C. FORD, San Francisco, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Emerson:—There is no obstacle placed in the way of white immigration by the Panama Government.

There are ten million acres of excellent sugar land entirely undeveloped. There is plenty of labor available in near-by countries, much of which would gladly come to Panama because of the disturbed political conditions in their own countries. The idle lands of Panama are so close to good water transportation as greatly to facilitate the development of the industry.

Sugar cane flourishes all over Panama. There are some large plantations already in operation, which have made good money. Within fifteen miles of the Canal there are idle lands sufficient to produce five million tons per annum. Most of this land belongs to the United States already, and the rest of it can be bought at an average price of five dollars per acre. The possibilities of refining sugar here is one not to be neglected. Panama might have become an important sugar producing country before this as there is nothing but the lack of capital to prevent such development.

Investors are warned, however, against precipitate action in taking up lands in Panama, as many failures have resulted from rushing in without adequate capital and the necessary experience and knowledge of conditions in the country.

Vacant and town-grant lands may be allotted by the nation in full ownership in three different forms, *viz:*

1. In the form of gratuitous grants to the municipalities, to heads of Panamanian families; to the heads of foreign families domiciled in the country; and to immigrants who may come to engage in agriculture.
2. In the forms of compensation or assistance for the construction of railways, tramways and roads; for the establishment in the country of new industries, and for the establishment or foundation and promotion of colonies.
3. In the form of a sale to any national or foreign individual or company, or to any corporation or association legally recognized, established and domiciled in the country.

An immigrant coming to the country with his family for the purpose of engaging in agricultural pursuits, shall acquire the right of a tract of ten hectares (hectare is equal to 2.47 acres) provided he submit to the laws, decrees and regulations governing immigration. An immigrant coming without a family shall be entitled to five hectares.

Real Estate Dealers:—Diazy Quijano, 1. Amador Plaza. Navarro y Arosemena, Chorrillo Ave. No. 64.

Price of Government Lands: 1 balboa ($1 U. S. A. gold) and fifty cents, or one-half balboa up to six balboas per hectare.

The Atlantic side and the Pacific side of Panama are almost two different countries, although it is not very far across—about fifty miles. On the Atlantic side there is a heavy rainfall, something like one hundred ten inches, whereas on the Pacific side it is about forty inches per annum. At Bocas del Toro (mouths of the bull) there is no positive and decided wet and dry seasons. Atlantic side is devoted to banana-growing, which item is controlled by the United Fruit Company.

On the Pacific side there are distinctly marked seasons.

Roads are badly needed. Foreigners suffer very much with malaria for the reason that they will not protect themselves against mosquitoes.

The administration of the public lands is directly under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of *Fomento* (Public Works), Panama City.

Before an investment is made, however, a representative should look over the matter. In the purchase of private lands one has to be very careful, owing to the confused condition of titles, and although land may be purchased, the title to which is apparently in perfect order and all legal requirements met, yet there is no guarantee that he may not at some future time find himself involved in a law suit with its consequent trouble, expense and loss of time.

It is best for you to go to the Canal Zone, and from there you can get the latest local data. Also write to Pan-American Bulletin, Washington, D. C., and ask them if they know of any available land with *clear title*, that is now offered for sale.

Spanish is the language, although most of the business houses have some one that talks English.

The Panama people are more like the Porto-Ricans; naturally friendly, if you approach them *right*, so as to *get* their confidence, and *keep* it.

Enclosed please find a monograph "Railroads of Central America," this will post you on that item. Then get a Rand & McNally's Pocket Map of Central America, thirty-five cents at newsdealers.

After you hear from the Pan-American Bulletin, then, if there are any other questions you wish to ask, just shoot them in and I will give you the benefit of twenty years in tropical countries.

The full statement of the sections in this department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Railroading in Mexico

AWHERE no Americans need apply:

Request:—Would you please give me what information you can on railroading in Mexico.

I am a man of twenty-five and have been a brakeman for about seven years.

What are the possibilities of getting work as brakeman in Mexico and what are the wages paid?

Are railroad men paid by the month or mileage as on all American railroads?

How is the climate in southern Mexico? Is it much warmer there than in California?"—A. GERVAIS, Hanford, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Newman:—With the exception of the Mexican Railway, and a few short mining roads, all the railroads in Mexico are controlled by the Mexican Government.

Nearly all road crews are strictly Mexican, although the Southern Pacific may have a few American engineers and conductors. I don't think there is an American brakeman in the country, and there is no possibility of an American getting work there. The days of the American railroadman in Mexico are gone, and they will never get another foothold there.

The railroads of Mexico hardly have enough work for men now in their employ.

As a general thing climate in Southern Mexico is semitropical, but varies according to the altitude in each particular locality, and it rains a lot in some localities.

For your information will say that any one desiring to enter the service of railroads in Mexico must be thoroughly familiar with the Spanish language.

Brakemen are paid by the kilometer, which is ⅝ of a mile. Eight hours constitutes a day's work; penalty overtime after eight hours. They make about four hundred pesos a month, or two hundred dollars.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

ONE of the most valuable recent contributions to the department was made the other day by Mr. A. S. White of Ontario; a group of eight songs learned in Canada, mainly from lumberjacks, about 1900. Two of these I print below, exactly as they came to me with the exception of a few changes in the punctuation.

The first, "Willie and Mary," is better known under the title "The Drowsy Sleeper." The text is one of the most perfect I have yet seen.

Willie and Mary

(*Text of A. S. W. "as sung in lumber camps north of Massey to Ste. St. Marie,* 1900-3.")

"Wake, awake! you drowsy sleeper,
Wake and listen unto me!
There's some one at your bedroom window,
A-weeping there so bitterly."

"Oh who is at my bedroom (window)
A-weeping there so bitterly?"
"Oh it is I, your dearest Willie,
A-weeping there so bitterly.

"Oh, Mary dear, go and ask your mother
If you my wedded bride might be;
If she says no, then come and tell me,
And I'll no longer trouble thee."

"Oh, Willie dear, I dare not ask her
If I your wedded bride might be,
But go and court some other lady
Who yet your bride might be."

"Then, Mary dear, go and ask your father
If you my wedded bride might be;
If he says no, then come and tell me,
And I'll no longer trouble thee."

"Oh, Willie dear, I dare not ask him
If I your wedded bride might be,
For by his side lies a silver dagger
To pierce the heart so true to me."

"I can climb the highest tree, love,
I can rob the richest nest,
I can court the gayest lady,
But not the one that I love best!"

Then Willie seized a shining dagger,
Pierced it through his manly heart,
Saying, "Farewell, Mary, farewell, Mary,
It's here we both shall never part."

Then Mary seized the silver dagger,
Pierced it through her lily-white breast,
"Farewell, father; farewell, mother;
It's here we both shall be at rest."

Of the second, Mr. White says: "This is one of the real old-timers sung by all classes of men. Heard it in Montreal in 1900. It was an old song at that time." This song goes under various names: "The Jealous Lover," "Lorella," "Florilla," "Flora Ella," etc. Although I believe that the "flow Ella" is merely a corruption, I keep to the text as sent to me.

Flow Ella

(*Text of A. S. W.—Ontario.*)

Down by yon weeping willows
Where the violets sadly bloom,
There lies one, fair flow Ella,
Lies sadly in her tomb.

She died not broken hearted,
No sickness on her fell;
But in one moment parting
From whom all she loved so well.

The moon was shining gaily,
Shone over hill and dale,
When to her lonely cottage
Her jealous lover came.

"Oh, Ellen, let us wander
Down by yon meadows gay,
And let us talk and ponder,
All on our wedding day."

"Oh, Edward, I am tired
Of wandering here alone.
Oh, Edward, I am weary;
I pray you'll take me home."

"Oh, you have not the wings of an angel
Or far from me you would fly!
Oh, Ellen, you've deceived me;
This night you must instantly die!"

Down on her knees she bended,
And begging for her life,
But into her snow-white bosom
He thrust that fatal knife.

"Oh fare you well, fond parents,
This is my dying breath;
I pray you will forgive me
When my eyes are closed in death.

"And fare you well, you Edward,
Far from you I must go.
May God forgive you, Edward,
And all your vows prove true."

Down on his knees he bended,
Crying out, "What have I done?
I've murdered my flow Ella,
As true as the rising sun!"

May peaceful be her slumber,
May the violets o'er her bloom.
There lies one, fair flow Ella,
Lies sadly in her tomb.

WHO can send me the complete text of a curious song called "Willie the Weeper," or can tell me something of its origin and history? I'm pretty sure that it's modern, and that it is a "vaudeville" production; still I'd like to know more about it. Here is a portion sent in the other day by a Camp-Fire comrade:

Willie the Weeper

Listen while I tell you of Willie the Weeper,
Willie the Weeper was a chimney sweeper.
He had the hop habit and he had it bad—
Listen while I tell you of the dream he had.

He went to Monte Carlo where he played roulette,
Won every penny and he never lost a bet.
Played all night till the bank went broke,
Layed himself down and took another smoke.

* * * * *

Then from Siam he went to Paris, France;
There he saw a hundred thousand hulas dance;
Bought a diamond bush and a ruby tree,
And he sent them home to his family.

DON'T forget that there are still ten days left in which to send your replies to my request for information concerning "Frankie and Johnny." In the last issue of this department I promised to present a six months' subscription to ADVENTURE to the reader who sent me *within one month* the most definite information concerning the actual characters on which this song was based, or the most accuate account of the song itself, or the best text or texts of it. Be sure that you are accurate in your statements; if you are giving rumors or tradition, say so. Send in your texts *just as you have heard them sung;* do not change or edit them in the slightest degree.

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all questions concerning them, direct to R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts. DO NOT send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JUNE 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE KILLING OF TOM McCRAY — ***Howard Ellis Davis***
The lumberjack fights in the stream.

PARDS A Five-Part Story Part II — ***Hugh Pendexter***
The *Singing Pilgrim* runs into more fire.

THE ELEVENTH HOUR — ***William Westrup***
The prospector went into the veld alone.

THE INVINCIBLE TRADITION — ***Theodore Seixas Solomons***
The Eskimo obeys the ice-law.

NORTH OF WATLING — ***John Webb***
Revenge in the fog.

THE BANDIT OF BANYALUKA — ***Fred F. Fleischer***
The Austrians couldn't catch him.

STILL FARTHER AHEAD

The three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Leonard H. Nason, Frederick Moore, Walter J. Coburn, Georges Surdez, John Murray Reynolds, Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, Charles Victor Fischer, L. Patrick Greene and Frank Robertson; and short stories by Bill Adams, Fairfax Downey, L. Paul, Royce Brier, George Bruce Marquis, Alex. McLaren, Alan LeMay, F. St. Mars, Warren Elliot Carleton, David Thibault, John Beames, Rolf Bennett and others; stories of bold dragoons in France, cowboys on the Western range, beachcombers in the South Seas, revolutionists in Central America, hardcase skippers on the Atlantic, prospectors in the silver country, Indian detectives on the reservation, doughboys on the Western Front, traders in Africa, skippers off Georges.

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